The Gospel of a Country Pastor

LELEN

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THE GOSPEL OF A COUNTRY PASTOR

Sketches and Sermons

BY THE

REV. J. M. LELEN

Author of "Towards the Altar," "The Duty of Happiness," "The Gospel of Pain," etc.

"The new need is the old Gospel."

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Preface to the 1961 Printing of
THE GOSPEL OF A COUNTRY PASTOR

This book was written years ago when I was a country pastor in Kentucky. At the request of a few friends I reprint it now in honor of Our Lady of the Fields, patroness of the Glenmary Seminary, where I am spending the evening of my life.

— J. M. L.

Glendale, Ohio
June 24, 1961

12772

Secretaria Di Stato
Di Sua Santita

From the Vatican
October 31, 1922

N. 9674
To the Rev. J. M. Lelen
Pastor St. Xavier Church
Falmouth, Kentucky

Reverend Father:

The Sovereign Pontiff has paternally accepted the homage of the work which you lately addressed to him, and it is from his heart that he thanks you.

The Holy Gospel is the Book Eternal which gives forth lights and lessons which are applicable to all times, and it is most praiseworthy to draw from it what is most befitting to the spiritual needs of the present hour.

As a token of the abundance of divine grace the Holy Father sends you from his heart the Apostolic blessing.

In thanking you for the copy which you had the kindness to send me personally, I beg you to accept the expression of my devotedness in Our Lord.

P. C. GASPARRI,
Cardinal Secretary of State to His Holiness Pope Pius XI

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Lovingly dedicated to

Our Lady of the Fields

and to

Father Bishop

Founder of the Glenmary Home Missioners

FOREWORD

"Back to Christ!"

"Back to the farm!"

I was indulging in a day dream with those two momentous mottoes as a somewhat shadowy subject when one of my oldest parishioners handed me the following sermon on the soil:

"I was born in the country. God's earth is to me a part and parcel of life. I live to dig. By digging I learn to think; I unearth strange sleeping silences; powers of thought fresh from the soil come forth to see God's light and sky. Thoughts, like creatures, prone to rest all day, are made to move when I dig.

"I like to sow. By sowing I learn to trust; God's promises can never be forgotten when with Him I make things grow. He plants His word as I sow the seed; out of my life He bringeth fruit, weak though my will, which makes me believe and pray, and trust and serve.

"I like to reap. By reaping I bring joy; I gather God's promises in my hand, and my heart goes out to Him for His goodness and mercies to all mankind. He makes His Word fall in due season; golden grain and whitened staple tell of His wealth and purity. I like to live because to me it hath been given to dig and sow and reap.

"My closing days on earth shall be in the country; digging, sowing, and reaping; then at the close to know that friendly earth is receiving me back and that upon my resting-place God's sun and rain shall ever fall — this is, indeed, to make of that silence a sweet communion with all I have known and loved. In the meanwhile

"Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see:
And what I do in anything
To do it as for Thee.

"A servant with this clause,
Makes drudgery divine:
Who tills the soil, as for Thy laws
Makes that, and the action, fine."

I read and read again this homely homily, and resolved to expatiate a little on it. This booklet which I hope will be followed by several others, is the result of my decision. I lovingly dedicate it to my faithful farmers of Falmouth with the hope that it may help them to cling to Christ and the farm.

If city people find that my writing, like the aforesaid sermon, is decidedly plain and commonplace, I will readily admit that so it is, just as are the making of a fire in the morning, the cooking of food, the baking of bread, the peeling of potatoes, the mend-

ing of clothes, the milking of cows and many other very *useful* labors usually done about the farm.

Take care of truth, and beauty will take care of itself: this has ever been my method and I am now too old to change it. In the hands of a priest the height of art is not to conceal art, but to ignore it. I write to be understood and thereby to do good: I care not whether the reader is pleased or not with my words.

"When a man is strong and in good spirits," says Liddon, "he likes to toy with style and speculations; but when he is sick, and suffering, and has another state of existence looming, however indistinctly, before him, he desires truth — a truth, too, which dares to assert itself as truth, which knows its responsibilities, its frontiers, its premises and its consequences, its foes and its supporters. To talk at the bedside of a dying man as if you were doubtful about your words, or afraid of offending literary susceptibilities, would be the acme of ridicule. Religion may have — it has — a literary side; but speaking broadly, literature is one thing, and religion is another and an infinitely higher and more sacred thing than literature. It is because our Lord's words go straight to the heart and soul of man that He shows Himself to be the Master of the absolute Religion; and that He gives us a warrant that what He says will not pass away."

All must admit that to give a new edge to truths

blunted by use, it is not needful that they should be clothed in language either gorgeous or elegant; but only that their expression should be such as we are not accustomed to; such as to make us stop and listen. Since, then, each individual has his own individual language and accentuation, it is always helpful to hear from others truths which, formulated in our own way, pass through our ears without friction and therefore escape our attention. For this reason it does not seem altogether presumptuous or unreasonable to flood the market with religious books, provided the author can claim personality of manner and disclaim all pretence at novelty in point of matter. A new gospel is not worth listening to; while to say the old things in the old words is tiresome.

In his book *The Holy Earth,* L. H. Bailey, the Nestor of rural writers, has told us that "a man cannot be a good farmer unless he is a religious man." That this sentence is true no one can deny, for a farmer's life is one of sacrifice and uncertainty; his labor lasts practically all day; few are his diversions and many are the risks he runs; more than any other man he depends upon the good pleasure of God, who sends rain and drought, sunshine and storm, success and failure. And if a farmer is not in the habit of looking heavenwards, the burden of the day becomes almost unbearable at times on his shoulders.

Farmers need God in the days of disaster and poverty, that they may be enabled to carry on their work and never be discouraged; they need Him also in the days of prosperity and rich crops, that they may make good use of His gifts for themselves and for humanity.

May this handbook of spiritual agriculture lead us all to Him, the Friend of the Farmers and Master of the Harvests!

INTRODUCTION

Before we study the Words and Works of our Lord Jesus Christ, it will be good for us to glance for one moment over the land where He lived and loved —

> "those holy fields
> Over whose acres walked those blessed feet
> Which, nineteen hundred years ago, were nailed
> For our advantage on the bitter Cross."

Indeed it were useful for us to place the geography of the land in living relation to its Sacred History. For, as Ritter says, "The geography of Palestine, as we find it today, is the strongest testimony of the truth of that history which purports to emanate thence. The natural scenery of Palestine speaks in but one voice in favor of the Bible; every word of the sacred narrative receives its best interpretation by being studied in connection with the place where it was recorded. No one can trace without joy and wonder the verification which geography pays to the history of the Holy Land. So strong is the argument drawn thence, that the most subtle dialectician is baffled by it and is entrapped in the net which

his own sophistry has spun." We could call Palestine "the fifth Gospel."

That land, that Holy Land, is not, however, proportioned in size or physical characteristics to its moral or historical position as the theatre of the most portentous events in the world's history. The land that contains the birthplace of our Lord and the cradle of divine revelations is only a strip of country about the size of our State of Massachusetts — about the fourth part of the size of Ireland — exactly 8,500 square miles in area. From the city of Dan, on the north limit, to Bersabee on the south, is a distance of only 139 miles; and the breadth averages barely 40.

When it is remembered that America was unknown until 1492, the position of Palestine on the map of the ancient world was remarkable. It seemed the very centre of the earth, and this position accounts for the long-prevailing belief that Jerusalem was the precise central point.

The boundaries of this country were the Mediterranean sea in the west; the Lebanon mountains on the north; on the east, the elevated plateau of the Syrian steppe that looked towards the great empires of Assyria and Babylonia; on the south, the mountainous desert of Arabia that shuts it in from Egypt. Truly it was an isolated country, "separated from among the people of the earth." It has a river, the Jordan, which flows from the foot of Mt. Hermon,

the highest peak of the Lebanon, and runs in a crooked line from the north to the south, connecting along its way the lake of Galilee with the Dead Sea, and dividing the whole country into two parts, the region west of the Jordan and the region east of it.

The region east of the Jordan extends from the shore of the Dead Sea to Mt. Hermon, and includes Perea, Decapolis, Trachonitis, and Iturea; its population was mainly pagan. Seldom did our Lord visit this part of the country; it was, however, in its northern side, near Cesarea Philippi, that He asked of His first followers that momentous question which for nearly nineteen centuries has riveted the eye of thinking and adoring Christendom: "Who say ye that I am?" It is there that St. Peter answered Him: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." It is there that Jesus said to St. Peter: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church." There, also our Lord performed several miracles and preached the doctrine of the heavenly Kingdom.

The region west of the Jordan stretched from the north to the south in the following order: Galilee, Samaria, Judea.

The most beautiful part of Galilee was near the lake of Genesareth or sea of Tiberias. The lake, a pear-shaped sheet of water, is fourteen miles long and six broad in its widest part. "In our Lord's

time," a traveller tells us, "it was a scene of wonderful beauty. Its deep blue waters were crossed and recrossed by boats of many shapes and sizes. There were heavily laden barges bearing the costly merchandise of the East to the custom-house on the shore; there were pleasure-skiffs darting here and there with gay parties bound for one or other of the handsome Roman villas by the lakeside; and there were fishing smacks in hundreds, some with nets lowered for a draught, others bringing home the fruits of the night's haul. The white beach showed boats being unladen, children looking on as the silvery load was landed and sorted, men and boys mending their nets on the strand or stretching them out to dry. Dotted all about were the cottages of the fishermen, and, coming down almost to the water's edge, glowed rich, waving cornfields and flowers of every hue. In the Jordan valley, where, sheltered from the winds, the vegetation was tropical, the sugar-cane flourished and palm trees with their feathery foliage. Higher up grew figs, almonds, olives. Higher still, walnut, oak, apple trees, each of these needing its own kind of soil and temperature, yet all at home here." Here were the cities whose names are so familiar to Christian ears — Tiberias, Magdala, Bethsaida, Capharnaum, Cana, Nazareth, Corozain.

To the south of Galilee was the province of Samaria. Josephus tells us that that land was of the

same character as Judea. Its inhabitants were a mixed race, partly Jews, partly Gentiles. Three times did Jesus visit Samaria.

Judea was the southernmost division of Palestine. Bleak and bare were the fields and hills of this region, but here is Bethlehem and here is Jerusalem, and here is Emmaus and here is Jericho. With Galilee, hallowed forever is this land to Christians, the land where Jesus dwelt among men.

This geographical sketch is sufficient for the present. In the course of our work, now and then, we will pen-picture the places where Jesus lived and loved and died.

CHAPTER I

IN THE STABLE

I

On that wintry night of the twenty-fourth of December, Mary and Joseph neared Bethlehem. The way had been long and weary — a four days' journey, whatever route had been taken from Nazareth. A sense of rest and peace must have crept over them when at last they reached the fields that surrounded the ancient "House of Bread," as "their own city" was called. Winter though it was, people of that country tell us that the green and silvery foliage of the olive might, even at that season, mingle with the pale pink of the almond — nature's early waker — and with the darker coloring of the opening peach bud. The trip of the two wayfarers was in obedience to a decree of the Roman Emperor, Cæsar Augustus, who had ordered a general census of all his subjects; "the whole world shall be enrolled": such was the imperial audacity of the phrase. In deference, however, to Jewish prejudices, this enrolment was not carried out in the ordinary Roman manner, at each

person's place of residence, but, according to Hebrew custom, at the town to which each family originally belonged.

The lowly carpenter of Nazareth, in Galilee, and his young wife, slowly trod their way, remembering the extraordinary events of the year and pondering over them. It was nine months ago today since the angel Gabriel came to Mary, asking her in God's name whether she would consent to become the mother of the Messiah, and the mystery of Incarnation took place at the word of the Virgin. Afterwards, it was the visit to St. Elizabeth, herself chosen and blessed by the Most High at an age when she had no more hope of becoming a mother, and Mary pouring forth her *Magnificat* had told her the secret of her vocation. Again, it was the wondrous dream of St. Joseph, freed from fear by an angel about the virtue of his most pure spouse, and hearing the great tidings that her unborn Child was of the Holy Ghost.

And so, their heart holily moved at the remembrance of those heavenly visions and angelic discourses, they marched with confidence towards the joys set in store for them. He was coming at last, "the Desired of all nations," the Messiah promised by God and predicted by the prophets. Yet a few hours and Jesus will be in the world. For the fullness of times has arrived, and the sun going down on

that evening under the horizon has saluted the night when the Christ is to be born.

Serene and tender, a hymn of thanksgiving and praise ascended from the heart to the lips of Mary, while Joseph, witnessing so much faith and humility, could only thank Divine Providence and consider himself unworthy of being so closely associated in the salvation of the world.

If they had not been folk full of faith, the poor workingman and his sweet companion surely would have found reasons to complain. Why such a long and painful trip when the Child was to come? Yonder in Nazareth, modest as was their home, it was a home after all, a home with kind neighbors whose friendly hands would have tended the young mother at the moment of her utmost need — for women are ever merciful to each other, in this one respect at least — but here they were strangers in a strange place. But they knew the prophecy of Micheas. A thousand years ago the seer had announced the glory which Jesus through His birth would shed on Bethlehem: "And thou Bethlehem, the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come the Leader that shall rule My people Israel." They understood, therefore, the import of the strange circumstances which called them away from Nazareth a few days before the greatest hour. They knew it was one of those di-

vine incidents in which the great Will rides over little human wills.

Mary was very tired: it is at least seventy miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and think of it as December, too, when the weather is chilly and the roads are in bad condition. I spoke of silver leaves of olives along the road, but it is like little steel swords in the wet light that they glance towards the holy Virgin. But the joy of her soul lessened her fatigue. Every step of hers, she knew it, made her ever nearer the spot where she would press upon her heart that Son so fervently desired — the God-Child who was to redeem sinful humanity.

II

As soon as they reached the end of their journey Joseph went to the inn of the village to find a shelter for the night. But, owing to the great number of newcomers, "there was no room for them."

Did they try to find another house? I have always been inclined to think that they rather received in their soul a grace of light in which they saw the plans of God concerning the nativity of His Christ.

Christ is the Light, the Life and the Weal of the world, the Gift of God to the universe, the Word which will say: "Come to Me all ye that suffer and are heavy laden"; it behooved that His birth should take place in the poorest possible manner. Coming

down from heaven to bring us the riches of heaven, He had resolved to live and die in such complete poverty that He could say: "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air, nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." This abjection was to end only when bare He would die on the bare Cross; but it had to be seen at His very birth. Bethlehem had to resemble Calvary to form with it but one mystery.

Mary and Joseph saw those lights from above. Wherefore, without delay, led by them rather than by sheer necessity, they went to the place where God had decided that the Divine Child should be born.

In the heart of a rock, in the outskirts of Bethlehem there were many natural caves as old as the earth. In one of them Mary and Joseph at last found a place worthy of the Forsaken One. The first prayer that Mary said there remains the secret of God.

That cave or grotto was at the same time a stable for cattle: therein were a manger, an ox and an ass. Isaias had said: "The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib: but Israel hath not known Me."

And in that cave, at midnight, nine months after having conceived Him in Nazareth, the Immaculate Virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus, the Word made flesh. Jesus went forth from His Virgin Mother

as the light from the sun, as a perfume from a flower, as a word from our lips. Words do not tear the lips that speak them; a flower is not altered by the perfume it gives forth; the sun loses nothing by emitting its rays. A Virgin before childbirth, Mary remained a Virgin after childbirth.

St. Luke calls Jesus "the firstborn son" of Mary. This, as usual in Hebrew, merely means that till then she had not had any child. As Jesus is the only Son of the Eternal Father, He is also the only Son of Mary. But as "the Father of mercies is pleased to adopt all men"; as "He predestinates Jesus to be the firstborn among many brethren," Mary is associated to this extended generation of the Word; and as the numberless brethren of Jesus shall call God their Father, they shall also call Mary their Mother.

This firstborn of God "Mary wrapped up in swaddling clothes and laid in the manger." This is all that the Gospel says. And this is enough to feed our faith. God has realized His Promise. Out of the race of Adam is born the Son of the Woman who, through and with the Woman, is to crush the head of the serpent, Satan. God has so loved the world as to give us His only-begotten Son: Unto us a Son is given:

> "Given, not lent
> And not withdrawn — once sent.

"Welcome all wonders in one sight!
Eternity shut in a span!
Summer in Winter, Day in Night!
Heaven in earth and God in Man!"

We have our Emmanuel, we have our Savior: ours in all manners, ours in truth, for this God who gives Himself to us is visibly "one of us," the same as we are when we are born, "being made to the likeness of men and in shape found as a man." He lives according to our ways and begins as we begin. He is weak — He cannot walk, He cannot stand up, He cannot speak, He needs His mother's help; He feels cold; He will have to grow and increase in wisdom and grace with God and men. He is the Son of Man — subject to all our infirmities — as well as the Son of God — endowed with infinitude.

Withal, we see already that this newborn Child is a Victim, the Lamb of God, the Redeemer of mankind. His birth in the lowly condition He has chosen is the beginning of an expiatory life, the first act of the Sacrifice which God awaits. The whole Gospel is here as in its germ: the Crib like the Cross cries out the Creed of the Christ.

III

At times perhaps we feel bewildered when we think of this first church — the Stable — where Jesus

vouchsafed to reside and receive the first homage of men. But soon we recover and realize that there never was anywhere in the universe a temple where He was better loved and adored. Mary and Joseph were there, the maiden mother and the man of truth. And since they were there, what did it matter that the walls were bare and dripping and that the ground was littered with straw, hay, and provender? What did it matter that the place was dark, cold, and silent? Their hearts were warm, their souls luminous and poured forth delightful harmonies.

But a few miles distant on a hill, towered the palace-fortress of Herod. The magnificent houses of his friends and courtiers crowded around its base. Therein could be heard the hired and voluptuous minstrelsy with which feasts were celebrated, or the shouting of the mercenaries whose arms enforced obedience to its despotic lord. But the true King of the Jews — the rightful Lord of the universe — was not to be found in palace or fortress. They who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. The cattle-stable of the lowly caverns was a more fitting birthplace for Him who came to reveal that the soul of the greatest monarch was no dearer or greater in God's sight than the soul of his meanest slave; for Him who from His cross of shame was to rule the world.

Before this emptiness of Christ, ungodliness, however, has ever violently protested. Such a birth in

such a place cannot be the birth of the Messiah, exclaim the blind men of the ages. And they refuse to recognize in the Son of Mary Him after whom the people of God longed for so many centuries. But we, His faithful followers, kneel down before His crib; we adore, we admire, and we understand the lessons that flow from the Stable of Bethlehem. With Tertullian we believe that the surroundings of outward poverty and misery, so far from detracting from, seem most congruous to His Divine character. Earthly splendor would here seem like tawdry tinsel, while the utmost simplicity appears like that clothing of the lilies which far surpassed all the glory of Solomon's court.

Fanciful writers of the dawn of Christianity speak of many prodigies that happened at the Nativity. They describe how at the awful moment, "the pole of the heaven stood motionless, and the birds were still, and there were workmen lying on the earth with their hands in a vessel, and those who handled it did not handle it, and those who took did not lift; and I saw the sheep scattered, and the sheep stood, and the shepherd lifted up his hand to strike, and his hand remained up; and I looked at the stream of the river, and the mouths of the kids were down and were not drinking." But of this sudden hush and pause of awestruck nature, of the parhelions and mysterious splendors which blazed in many parts of the world, and of many another won-

der which rooted itself in earliest tradition there is no trace whatever in the New Testament. The inventions of man differ wholly from the dealings of God.

The Gospels, always truthful, give the facts without comment. There is in them nothing of the exuberance of marvel and mystery. There is no more decisive criterion of their absolute credibility as simple histories than the marked and violent contrast which they offer to all the spurious gospels of the early centuries and all the imaginative legends which have clustered around them.

IV

Throughout the avenues of the ages, the Gospels in hand, then, who would not fain contemplate the mother of Jesus near the piteous cradle where her Son is resting? Who would not like to see how, feeble as she is, she wraps Him up with baby clothes? — yes, St. Luke hints at it, she has brought them with her, those linens and those woolens spun and woven by her in Nazareth. — Who would not like to see how she lays Him in the Manger? In the Manger! O, my friends of the farm, how far we are from the coziness and the innocent stylishness of those mothers of ours who for a long, long time dream of the cradle of their firstborn child: "It would be of solid gold if I could afford it," one day

I heard a mother say. Nothing seems too dear, neither lace nor ribbons, to enshrine the pink little baby. I do not blame the solicitude of mothers, but still I see and say that Jesus our God took His first rest in a little bit of straw, in that very crib where a few hours before, an ox and an ass had found their feed. How such a sight is apt to console the poor and guard them from envy; what a light it could give to the rich who so often rush into stupid expenses!

Let the example of Mary be of profit to you, O Christian women. In that weak Child, who seems so powerless, the Blessed Virgin sees and adores her God, Him who made the world with its numberless riches, Him who through His Providence rules the great and the lowly, Him who one day at the end of time will judge us all. You also, then, in the wee cradle where your sons slumber in the envelope of their so frail bodies, contemplate and admire the souls therein nestling, those immortal souls which He has hallowed by baptism, which He wills to embellish with graces and virtues, and which He destines—when the struggles and sorrows of this earth are over — to the glorious peace and happiness of His eternal paradise.

Before the first Christmas, in the pagan lands of antiquity, children were not loved as they are now; no halo of romance and tenderness encircled them; too often they were subjected to shameful cruelties

and hard neglect. But He who came to be the friend and helper of all, came also to be the protector and friend of helpless infancy and innocent childhood. Three utterances came forth from His Divine lips about them: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of God." "Amen, I say to you, unless you be converted and become as little children you shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven." "He that shall receive one such little child in My Name receiveth Me. But he that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged around his neck and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea. See that you despise not one of these little ones for I say to you that their angels in heaven always see the face of My Father who is in heaven." And ever since humanity heard and pondered these divine sentences, which are the charter of childhood, childhood has become to Christian generations an object of respect, admiration, and tenderness. It is since then, not before, that lines like these were written:

"When grace is given us ever to behold
A child some sweet months old,
Love, laying across our lips his finger, saith,
Smiling, with bated breath,
Hush! for the holiest thing that lives is here
And heaven's own heart how near!

How dare we that may gaze not on the sun
Gaze on this verier one?
Heart, hold thy peace; eyes, be cast down for shame;
Lips, breathe not its name.
In heaven they know what name to call it: we,
How should we know?"

Verily, childhood has been transfigured by Christianity: of heaven, heavenly, now it is: before Christ, of earth, earthly, it was.

V

Let the thought of the Stable of Bethlehem be sweet to you, O my farmers, too often so uncomfortably housed and poorly fed and paid. Think of that December night when Jesus so pitifully came to this world. O my sons of the soil, what does it matter, after all, where you sleep, since you sleep so well after the hard toil of the day, and since your souls are so well kept in the peace of the Lord? O you who have to work in and around the stables, remember that it was a sad one, the Stable where the Lamb of God was born; and let a fervent prayer arise from your lips to implore and praise our Divine Savior.

To all I say that we all have to reserve a choice room for Jesus in the hostel of our heart. So often it happens that we do not let Him come in as He would fain desire. Pleasures, business, worldly

thoughts, social calls take too large a share of our life and of our heart which He made so great and which we make so small. When He comes to us there is no room for Him. Fools that we are! The name of Jesus is Happiness-that-passes-by, and perhaps He will never return if He has to go without being received.

O poor, divine Christ of the Crib, have mercy on us, have mercy on this our native land. O Holy Child, bless and safeguard the cradles of our country, for we are in sore need of good Christians and good Americans. Tonight the sky is red, but will it be fair tomorrow?

CHAPTER II

THE SHEPHERDS

"In the field and with their flocks abiding,
  They lay on the dewy ground;
And glimmering under the starlight
  The sheep lay white around.
When the Light of the Lord streamed o'er them,
  And lo! from the heaven above
An angel leaned from the glory,
  And sang his song of love:

" 'To you, in the City of David,
  A Savior is born today!'
And sudden a host of the Heavenly ones
  Flashed forth to join the lay!
O never hath sweeter message
  Thrilled home to the souls of men,
And the heavens themselves had never heard
  A gladder choir till then."

F. W. Farrar

Yes, that Night, that holy Night, there were shepherds watching their flocks in the very place consecrated by tradition as that where the Messiah was to

be first revealed. Of a sudden came the long-delayed, unthought-of announcement. Heaven and earth seemed to mingle, as suddenly an angel stood before their dazzled eyes, while the outstreaming glory of the Lord seemed to enwrap them as in a mantle of light.

Surprise, awe, fear, were hushed into calm and expectancy, as from the angel they heard that what they saw boded not judgment, but ushered in to waiting Israel the great joy of those good tidings which he brought: that the long-promised Savior, Messiah, Lord, was born in the city of David, and that they themselves might go and see and recognize Him by the humbleness of the circumstances surrounding His Nativity.

But let us read the very account of the Gospel:

"There were shepherds in the country, dwelling out in the fields, and keeping the night-watches over their flock. And lo! an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sorely afraid. And the angel said to them: 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people; for there is born to you today in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this is the sign to you; you will find a babe wrapped in swathing-bands, and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying:

" 'Glory to God in the highest
And on earth peace to men of good will.' "

Jesus is born: straightway, although it is the dead of night, must be invited some faithful folks to His cradle. From the sky that blossoms with their celestial forms and faces, angels come to cry it out and summon His first courtiers. Who will these be? The rich, the learned, the happy of this world? No. As He will call only poor fishermen to be His first disciples and the doctors of His Church the angels convoke only plain, humble shepherds.

"In choosing these shepherds of Bethlehem," says Father Breen, "as witnesses of the authenticity of His birth, Christ adhered to His original design of teaching the world that its valuation of temporal goods and honors is wrong. The world's basis of showing honor is not founded on the intrinsic goodness of man, but on his possessions or some other extrinsic adjunct. Had Christ chosen the learned doctors, or the men of power and wealth in His nation, it would appear an approbation of the world's line of action in such matters. No one else would be as much at home in the stable as the poor, simple shepherd. It was another act in the condescension of Christ, who came down to the lowest grade of human life that He might the more efficaciously teach men how to live. There is a wondrous majesty in the birth at Bethlehem. It would be obscured and weakened by the changing

of one factor. There is no majesty in selfish ease. Not in attending to personal comforts, but in renouncing them, is man great. And so, from His birth in the manger to His death-bed on the hard wood of the Cross, Christ takes the lead in the renunciation of selfish interests and comforts. Again, had Christ come among men in a higher social station, the poor and the unhonored might say: 'He thinks not of us; everyone on earth elbows us aside, and even Christ has confirmed by His course of action that they who have money are the best.' In a word, the equilibrium of human life had been disturbed by man's adoration of Mammon. Christ endeavors to recall it to the harmonious order wished by God, by honoring poverty in His birth. Hence the virtuous poor are the nobility of Christ."

Wealthy Magi and Kings will be called later on, but they will be ushered in only after our dear country peasants. And this the more deeply moves us when we think how despised were the poor by the pagans. The hour had indeed struck when the first were going to be the last. Henceforth those who never knew or those who had forgotten it, began to learn that God is in no need of human grandeur and that to Him simplicity and candor of soul are preferable to the tinsel of riches and the flash of titles and dignities.

Simple and candid they were, these shepherds.

It is claimed that they may have been members, though poor and humble, of that true Israel which included Mary and Joseph, Zachary and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna — the representatives of the saints of their nation in its bright past. They must have been looking out, in their simple way, towards the invisible and eternal, and seeking that kingdom of God for themselves which was one day, as they believed, to be revealed to their nation at large. Only that mind which has sympathy with external nature can receive in their true significance the impressions God wants to convey, and only the heart which has sympathy with spiritual things can recognize their full meaning. And such was their mind. The stillness over hill and valley, broken only by the bleating of the sheep; the unclouded brightness of the Syrian sky, with its innumerable stars; and the associations of those mountain pastures, dear to every Jew as the scenes of David's youth, were over and around them.

But let us return to the beautiful narrative of St. Luke:

"When the angels departed from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another: 'Let us go over to Bethlehem, and see the thing that is come to pass, which the Lord has shown us.' And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Infant lying in the manger. When they saw it, they made known the word which had been spoken

to them about this little Child. And all who heard marvelled at the things that were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things which they had heard and seen, as it was told them."

Without drawing on our imagination we can represent to our minds the greetings of the shepherds to the King of glory, who for love of us vouchsafed to make Himself so small; we can also see the blessings which they received from being, with Mary and Joseph, the first worshippers of Jesus.

Eloquent is the lesson which they give us by their prompt belief in the word of the angel and their quickness in complying with the call from above. Eloquent also is the fact that, when they return to their fields, they glorify and praise God, thereby teaching us the duty of gratitude.

"The figures of the shepherds," says Father Faber, "have grown to look so natural to us in our thought-pictures of Bethlehem that it almost seems now as if they were inseparable from it and indispensable to the mystery. What a beautiful congruity there is between the part they play, and their pastoral occupation! The very contrasts are congruities. Heaven opens, and reveals itself to earth, making itself but one side of the choir to sing the office of the Nativity, while earth is to be the other; and earth's answer to the open heavens is the pastoral gentleness

of those simple-minded watchmen. She sets her shepherds to match the heavenly singers, and counts their simplicity her most harmonious response to angelical intelligence. Truly earth was wise in this her deed, and teaches her sons philosophy. It was congruous, too, that simplicity should be the first worship which the outer world sent into the stable of Bethlehem. For what is the grace of simplicity but a permanent childhood of the soul, fixed there by a special operation of the Holy Ghost, and therefore a fitting worship for the Holy Child Himself? Their infant-like heavenly-mindedness suited His infantine condition, as well as it suited the purity of the heavenly hosts that were singing in the upper air. Beautiful figures! on whom God's light rested for a moment and then all was dark again; they were not merely shapes of light, golden imaginings, ideal forms, that filled in the Divine Artist's mysterious picture. They were living souls, tender yet not faultless men, with inequalities in the monotony of their human lot that often lowered them in temper and in repining to the level of those around them. They were not so unlike ourselves, though they float in the golden haze of a glorious picture. They fell back out of the strong light, without any complaint, to their sheep-flocks and their night watches. Their after-years were hidden in the pathetic obscurity which is common to all blameless

poverty; and they are hidden now in the sea of light which lies like a golden veil of mist close round the throne of the Incarnate Word."

II

O you country people, who at your every step can hear God and see Him in the flower of the road, in the song of the birds, in the bee-hive's hum, in the wheat that stirs with the sap of the spring, in the drops of rain and in the rays of the sun, in all those harmonies of nature, take care to proclaim like the shepherds His power and His generosity, that He may safeguard and bless you! In the cities, believe me, there are too many clamorous jars, and the smoke is too dense: eyes cannot see and ears cannot hear; and lips are too often impure with blasphemies. O you, to whom God's Providence speaks every day and displays itself everywhere, under the sun and the stars, openly and fearlessly learn to proclaim how great is the beauty and how merciful the goodness of your Creator. Ever make your intercourse with His works deepen your faith in His Word:

> "The works of God are fair for nought
> Unless our eyes, in seeing,
> See hidden in the thing the thought
> That animates its being.

"The outward form is not the whole
But every part is moulded
To image forth an inward soul,
That dimly is unfolded.

"The shadow pictured in the lake,
By every tree that trembles,
Is cast for more than just the sake
Of that which it resembles.

"The dew falls lightly, not alone
Because the meadows need it;
But hath an errand of its own,
To human souls that heed it.

"The stars are lighted in the skies
Not merely for their shining;
But like the light of loving eyes,
Have meanings worth divining.

"The waves that moan along the shore,
The winds that sigh in blowing,
Are sent to teach a mystic lore,
Which men are wise in knowing.

"The clouds around the mountain peak,
The rivers in their winding,
Have secrets which, to all who seek,
Are precious in the finding.

"Thus nature dwells within our reach;
But though we stand so near her,
We still interpret half her speech
With ears too dull to hear her.

"Whoever at the coarsest sound
Still listens for the finest.
Shall hear the noisy world go round
To music the divinest.

"Whoever yearns to see aright,
Because his heart is tender,
Shall catch a glimpse of heavenly light
In every earthly splendor.

"So since the universe began,
And till it shall be ended,
The soul of nature, soul of man,
And soul of God are blended."

"The wonders of the visible creation," wrote St. Gregory the Great, "are the footprints of our Creator Himself; as yet we cannot see Him, but we are on the road that leads to this vision when we admire Him in the things that He has made. And so we call created things His footprints, because they are made by Him, and guide us to Himself."

CHAPTER III

IN THE VILLAGE OF NAZARETH

"At Nazareth when the hours seemed long,
Our Lady would keep in her heart a song,
As she plied all her tasks in her perfect way;
For she knew quite well that the close of day
Would bring Jesus home her cares to allay
At evening.

"And so when the great red sun would sink
Down into the West, and the stars would wink,
As they peered one by one through the purple sky,
She would stand at her door and with eager eye
Expectantly wait as her Jesus drew nigh
At evening.

"Then quickly across the fields He would come,
Quite wearied with toil and glad to be home:
And Mother and Son at their humble door
Would lovingly meet, while the starlight would pour
A soft reverent light on their cottage-floor,
At evening.

"Oh, it were hard for mere words to tell
The joy with which Mary's spirit would swell,

As she pillowed her head upon Jesus' breast.
All her cares as He tenderly soothed and caressed
Would vanish. Yea, truly Mary was blest
At evening.

C. A. Burns, S. J.

"When Herod died, there appeared an angel of the Lord in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, 'Rise, take the Child and His mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the Child's life are dead.' So he rose, and took the Child and His mother and went to the land of Israel; but on hearing that Archelaus reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there and, by a divine injunction in a dream, withdrew to the region of Galilee. He went and settled in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been said by the prophets might be fulfilled: 'He shall be called a Nazarene.' And the Child grew and waxed strong, full of wisdom; and the grace of God was in Him."

From Bethlehem to Egypt, and now from Egypt to Nazareth, such was the peregrination of Mary and Joseph with the Divine Child.

In the midst of the ruins everywhere heaped up in the Holy Land, the village of Nazareth is still full of life and inhabitants. Reverently and lovingly pilgrims go there; accurately they tell us of it.

"The highlands which form the central portion of Palestine," says Geikie, "are broken by the wide, rich plain of Jezreel, which severs Galilee from the rest of the land. This was always the great battle-field of Israel. Appropriately, it is shut in as between mountain-walls. That along the north of the plain is formed by the mountains of Lower Galilee, cleft about in the middle by a valley that widens, till, after an hour's journey, we stand within an enclosure which seems almost one of nature's own sanctuaries. As in an amphitheatre fifteen hill tops rise around. That to the west is the highest. On its lower slope nestles a little town, its narrow streets ranged like terraces. This is Nazareth. Climbing this hill, fragrant with aromatic plants, and bright with rich-colored flowers, a view almost unsurpassed opens before us. For the Galilee of the time of Jesus was not only of the richest fertility, cultivated to the utmost, and thickly covered with towns and villages, but the centre of every known industry. Northward the eye would sweep over a rich plain; rest here and there on white towns, glittering in the sunlight; then quickly travel over hills and glens, till, passing beyond, the view is bounded by that giant of the far-off mountain chain, snow-tipped Hermon. Westward stretched a like scene of beauty and wealth, while on the edge of the horizon lay purple Carmel; beyond it a fringe of silver sand, and then the dazzling sheen of the

Great Sea. In the farthest distance, white sails, like wings outspread towards the ends of the world; nearer, busy ports, then, centres of industry; and close by, travelled roads, all bright in the pure Eastern air and rich glow of the sun. But if you turned eastwards the eye would soon be arrested by the wooded height of Tabor, yet not before attention had been riveted by the long, narrow string of caravans, and curiosity roused by the motley figures of all nationalities, busy binding the East to the West by the line of commerce that passed along the route winding around Tabor. And when, weary with the gaze, you looked once more down on little Nazareth nestling on the breast of the mountain, the eye would rest on a scene of tranquil, homely beauty. Just outside the town, to the northwest, bubbled the spring or well, the trysting-spot of townspeople, and welcome resting-place of travellers. Beyond it stretched lines of houses, each with its flat roof standing out distinctly against the clear sky; watered, terraced gardens, gnarled wide-spreading fig trees, graceful, feathery palms, scented oranges, silvery olive trees, thick hedges, rich pasture land, then the bounding hills to the south."

Such was the country of the Child Jesus and if we scan the Gospels we get a glimpse of its people and their manners. "Busy labor enlivens the vineyard, or ploughs the field, or digs the garden. In

the towns, building is going on vigorously: the extra millstone lies ready beside the mill: the barns are filled and new ones about to be built: vineyards stretch along the terraced hillsides, and outside the towns are seen the white-washed stones of sepulchres. On the roads, and beside the hedges, the blind and crippled await the gifts of passers-by: laborers are being hired in the market places, and the farm servant wends homewards in the evening with his plough: the song and dance of lighthearted youth on the village green, are heard from a distance: the children play in the open places of the towns: and visitors knock at closed doors even in the night. The hum of lusty many-colored life everywhere rises: the busy crowds have no time to think about higher things. One has bought a field and must go to see it, another has to prove a new yoke of oxen, and a third has some other business — a feast, a marriage or a funeral. They eat, they drink, they buy, they sell, they plant, they build, they marry wives and are given in marriage, as full of the world in its ambitions, cares, labors and pleasures, as if the little moment of their lives were to last forever "on this little O, the earth."

Among such people and in that country Jesus spent by far the largest part of His life on earth. It was here that "as the flower of roses in the spring of the year and as lily by the waters" He grew up as other children grow, only in a childhood of stainless

and sinless beauty. It is here that He heard the voice of God in every sound of nature, in every occupation of life, in every interstice of solitary thought. It is here that He shared the games of the children, saw the springing of the fountains and the glory of the mountain flowers in their transitory loveliness, heard the hoarse cry in their wind-rocked nest of the raven's callow brood, and watched the habits of the fox in its secret lair. It is here that He drew food for moral illustrations and spiritual thought. In fact this was His home for all but three years of His earthly life. Indeed Nazareth is the village which lent its then ignominious name to the scornful title written upon His cross; the village from which He did not disdain to draw His appellation when He spoke in vision to Saul: "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest." Alas! it is from here also that "they thrust Him out and brought Him to the brow of the hill, wherein the city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong." It is here that He said: "No prophet is accepted in his own country."

Nor must we lose sight of the fact that it was in these silent years that a great part of His task was done. They were the years of a sinless childhood, a sinless youth, a sinless manhood — spent in humility, toil, obscurity, submission, contentment, prayer, to make them an eternal example to our race.

We cannot imitate Him in the work of His ministry, nor can we even reproduce in our own experience the external circumstances of His life during the three crowning years. But the vast majority of us are placed by God's own appointment amid those quiet duties of a commonplace and uneventful routine which most closely resemble the thirty years of His retirement; it was during these years that His life is for us the main example of how we ought to live. "Take notice here," says St. Bonaventure, "that His doing nothing wonderful was in itself a kind of wonder. For His whole life is a mystery; and as there was power in His actions, so was there power in His silence, in His inactivity, and in His retirement. The sovereign Master, who was to teach all virtues, and to point out the way of life, began from His youth up, by sanctifying in His own person the practice of the virtuous life He came to teach, but in a wondrous, unfathomable, and, till then, unheard-of manner."

II

"Through the months of the four seasons," writes Father Faber, "through the days of the week with their varying occupations, through the hours of the day from the pearly dawn until the starry dusk, through the quiet watches of the nights of sleep and prayer, we must familiarize ourselves with our

Lord's Hidden Years at Nazareth. His real growth of Body, perceptible from time to time, would seem a worshipful mystery, when we consider who He was. Here in autumn He is lifting weights which in spring He could not have lifted. The light is changed in His eye, because the maturity of years is deepening it. The tone of His voice is graver because the power of years is toning it. The voice of the Eternal Word broke, like the voices of other boys. His mother's ways come up upon the surface of His bodily gestures and surprise us into tears. We cannot watch this common growth of His human Body without adoring.

"But the seeming growth of His Soul is yet more wonderful. He appears more holy than He was a month ago. Grace looks as if it had developed in Him. It does not seem merely as if circumstances had opened wider fields for His grace, or had conferred upon them more advantageous positions. But it seems as if He grew in grace. The very seeming of such a thing is adorable, the more adorable because we know it is but seeming. His grace never grew from the first moment of His conception. But greater wisdom gives grace more liberty. Does He then seem more holy simply because He has grown wiser? But He has not grown wiser. This also is but a mysterious semblance; but here again the semblance is of itself adorable. Never-

theless He makes acquisitions, and this is truly a growth, yet in Him hardly a growth. Rather it is one of His loving condescensions. He gains no new knowledge. He does not grow in science: He only becomes master by acquisition of the same science of which He was master before in higher ways. He knows certain things, such things as life's experience is capable of teaching, in two ways, instead of knowing them in one way. He has now a double knowledge of them, an acquired knowledge in addition to the infused knowledge He had before."

This is exquisitely well said and grandly worth perusing, but let us leave to the theologians the arduous care to establish in learned and long theses what was the progress of the Divine Child; let us rather present Jesus as a Model to all children, young and old.

He was obedient! What a lesson in these three words to the pitiful creatures that we are! What a curb to our pride so easily in revolt. He who was subject to a poor carpenter and a lowly woman, was He by whom all things were made, and without whom was not made anything that hath been made, He who at this hour guides the march of the sun and the stars and rules the waves of the oceans.

He was pious! His life, needless to say, was a permanent prayer; a blending of His will with the

will of His Father. It were almost irreverent to expatiate on this.

He was good! Here as everywhere He went about doing good, but there was nothing sombre or morose around Him. He was the joy of His home; His smile was a sunbeam; He helped His mother when she worked in the kitchen or in the laundry; He helped St. Joseph in the shop; He ran errands for both; with both He prayed and played. He was the human Being as well as the Divine Being.

God and Man! Here, without ever trying to explain the union of the Divinity with the Humanity of Jesus — an explanation which is impossible since it involves the comprehending of God — we perhaps ought to emphasize the entireness of both. We never think of Jesus enough as God, never enough as Man; the instinctive habit of our minds being always to miss of the Divinity, and the reasoning and enforced habit to miss of the Humanity. We are afraid to harbor in our hearts, or to utter in the hearing of others, any thought of our Lord, as hungering, tired, sorrowful, having a human soul, a human will, and affected by events of human life as a human creature is; and yet one half of the efficiency of His atonement, and the whole of the efficiency of His examples, depend on His having been this to the full.

But we are in haste to read the episode of His hidden life, the only one related by the Gospels:

"His parents used to journey every year to Jerusalem, at the feast of the Passover. When He was twelve years old they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast; and when they had completed the days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem, and His parents knew it not; but supposing Him to be in the caravan, they went a day's journey, and were seeking Him among their relatives and acquaintances; and not finding Him they returned to Jerusalem, looking for Him. And after three days they found Him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors and asking them questions. All who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. And when they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him: Son, why hast Thou done so to us; see, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing. And He said to them: How is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about the things of My Father? And they did not understand the word which He spoke to them. And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth; and He was subject to them. And His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age, and in grace with God and men."

No need of comment here. Better for us it is to bring this incident into comparison with some episodes of our rural life.

When our farmers' little boys have grown up, one day comes when they present themselves, not to the doctors of the law, but to the pastor of the parish. They are about seven years old, the age when they must begin or continue their religious instruction and their moral education: the time when they must learn their Catechism.

Catechism! How many a remembrance is awakened by this word, and how many pages we could transcribe on it! So many have praised it! So many of our best people have found there, and nowhere else, a complete food for their soul!

With the sacred formulas of that religious manual which they engrave in their memory, children learn what they must believe, what they must do, and what they must love. Therein they acquire right thoughts about God, right ideas of themselves and of their destiny, right ideas of sin and evil, right thoughts of the four last things; right thoughts of Jesus and His mother, right thoughts of the faith and practice of Christian life: Therein they learn the three ideals of life: truth, goodness, and beauty — truth that brings light, goodness that brings honesty, beauty that brings happiness: God's truth, God's goodness, God's beauty.

Too lofty, too sublime for children, you say. No.

Speak to them and see for yourself how this naturally Christian soul enjoys a special grace from God to deal with the things of heaven:

"Oh! say not, dream not, heavenly notes
To childish ears are vain,
That the young mind at random floats
And cannot reach the strain.

"Dim or unheard, the words may fall,
And yet the Heaven-taught mind
May learn the sacred air, and all
The harmony unwind."

Has not the highest of all authorities told us that "things that are hidden from the wise and prudent are revealed to the little ones"?

They are soon ready for the Banquet of God, these little ones of God. You tell me that they are not yet worthy of receiving Jesus; I know, but surely Jesus is worthy of being received by them. The priest then opens the door of the tabernacle, he takes into his hands, he places on their tongue, he enshrines in their pure heart the Holy Host of the first Communion. And at the same time he utters the words that shall re-echo in time and in eternity: "The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve thy soul unto everlasting life." And in that morning when our first communicants have received Jesus and have renewed to Him their baptismal vows,

small as they are, their real life begins. Henceforth they have to march in the footsteps of Him who now lives in them. According to His example, and with His help and your help, O Christian parents, may they do their best to progress in wisdom and in grace, before God whom they honor by their faithfulness, before men whom they edify by their virtues. Watch over them, O ye fathers and mothers, for the peace of your conscience and the joy of your old days are at stake. Lovingly and strongly ever watch over them, that you may never have to shed tears over their loss. Yours is a great responsibility. On the day of the final judgment, God, who has entrusted them to you, will ask an account of your stewardship. Blessed will you be if you are in a position to answer: "Lord, I have raised them in Thy love."

There are many harvests in a lifetime, but there is only one seed time. All depends on the beginnings. Look to any budding mischief before it has time to ripen into maturity. Watch your children from their babyhood; let the first word they speak be the Name of Jesus. Give yourselves the joy to be their first catechist.

CHAPTER IV

THE LAMB OF GOD

In those little villages of French Canada whose names sound like a litany of saints, the greatest day of the year is the feast of St. John the Baptist. In fact, it is the national holiday. But when, on the morning of the 24th of June, houses awake embowered in the midst of roses, and when at twilight fires are kindled on the hill tops and on the lea and on the swards, few perhaps are those who remember that they re-echo adown the vista of nineteen hundred years the word of the angel, proclaiming that "many shall rejoice" in honor and in memory of the son of Zachary and Elizabeth. Few they are who know the wondrous circumstances of his birth: the angel Gabriel appearing and standing on the right side of the altar of incense, and announcing to the priest that a son shall comfort his old age and cover his family with unexpected glory; Zachary stricken with dumbness for having been doubtful, but able to speak again, nine months later, after the delivery of Elizabeth; the astonishment of relatives, neighbors and friends, witnesses of these wonders

and, saying: "What a one think ye, shall this child be, for the hand of the Lord is with him."

There are wonders at every step in the childhood of St. John the Baptist, but not less prodigious is his life. As soon as he is of age, he withdraws from his family and mankind, to the caves of the wilderness stretching away from Hebron, his native town, and begins to prepare himself for his sacred mission.

Travellers who have visited that country tell us that no words can picture the wild grandeur of the desert of Judea. "It is," says Geikie, "a dreary waste of rocky valleys; in some parts stern and terrible — the rocks cleft and shattered by earthquakes and convulsions, into rifts and gorges sometimes a thousand feet in depth, though only thirty or forty in width; in others, stretching out in bare chalk hills full of caves, or in white, flint-bound ridges, and winding, muddy wadies, with an occasional reservoir, hewn in the hard limestone, to supply water in a land destitute of springs. One may travel all day, and see no other life than the desert partridge, and a chance fox or vulture. Only the dry and fleshy plants, which require no water, grow on the hills, and in the valleys the most luxuriant vegetation is the white broom bushes, which blossom in March. The whole district is, in fact, the slope of the midland chalk and limestone hills, from their highest point of nearly 3,000 feet, near

Hebron to 1,000 at the valley of the Dead Sea. The Hebrews fitly call it Jeshimon — the appalling horror — for it is not possible to conceive a more desolate region. On the northern side, valleys of great depth, sinking towards the Dead Sea, almost preclude travelling except in their troughs, and farther south the country is absolutely impassable. Huge perpendicular gorges have been hollowed out by the great torrents, rushing in winter over the precipices. The only natural site for a town, in the whole district, is the opening at the foot of the pass of Engaddi, the spring of the wild goats, above the shores of the sea, and this is reached only by a narrow, serpent-like path, down cliffs twelve hundren feet high,"

It is here that in some cave, or in the depth of a narrow gorge, John took up his abode, to be alone with God and his own soul.

The Gospels supply us with glimpses of the Baptist's appearance and way of living. His hair hung low about him. His only food was the locusts which he found on the bare hills, and the wild honey which he gathered from the clefts of rock, and his only drink a draught of water from some stony hollow. His dress was in keeping with the austerity of his life. A burnous of camels' hair, bound round his body by a leathern girdle, was his garment. And then, all in the man was true and real. Not a reed shaken by the wind, but unbendingly

firm in deep and settled conviction; not ambitious nor self-seeking, but most humble in his self-estimate, discarding all claim but that of lowliest service, and pointing away from himself to "Him who was to come," and whom as yet he did not even know. Above all, there was the deepest earnestness, the most utter disregard of men, the firmest belief in what he announced. For himself he sought nothing: he was as a voice not to be inquired about, but heard; for them he had only one absorbing thought: "Do penance; the Kingdom of heaven is at hand: the King is coming!"

"The Kingdom of heaven is at hand!" Such were the words that he uttered when, being then thirty years old, he left his retreat and appeared on the Lower Jordan. It was the late autumn of the year that we number as the year of Rome 779, which, it may be noted, was a Sabbatic year, a year of rest. Released from business and agriculture, the multitudes flocked around him as he passed to his mission. Rapidly the tidings spread from town and village to distant homesteads, still swelling the number that hastened to the banks of the sacred river to hear him and receive his baptism, confessing their sins.

Standing on a sunlit eminence of peace and purity, unblinded by the petty mists that dim their vision, untroubled by the petty influences that disturb their life, the new Elias cried out to all: "Do penance.

Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight His paths." To the Pharisees, the hypocrites, and to the Sadducees, the unbelievers of that day, his words were still more fiery: "You brood of vipers, who told you to flee from the coming wrath? Now produce fruit that answers to repentance. The axe is lying all ready at the root of the tree; any tree that is not producing good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier, and I am not fit even to carry His sandals; He will baptize you with the holy Spirit of fire. His winnowing-fan is in His hand, He will clean out His threshing-floor, His wheat He will gather into the barn, but the straw He will burn with fire unquenchable."

To others, no doubt, gentler tones succeeded. There were persuasions to a better life. There were hints and more than hints of better public conditions and of brighter personal hopes. The great political yearnings and beliefs of the Jews were gathered into a form vague at first, then clearer, then definite, then positive. The speaker threatened, but he promised; he condemned, but he reassured. He scathed his hearers for their vices, but he flung before them the banner of their great National Hope, their long-cherished, proud, and splendid expectation: "Your Deliverer is within reach! He whom ye have trusted and awaited is close at

hand. Behold, He cometh! Prepare the way for Him."

II

But lo! now the Coming One has come, the Unfallen, Unsinning Man is here!

It was in the winter of the year 780, on the 6th or 10th of January.

There was not in the past any personal acquaintance between the Christ and the Baptist. But the All-knowing knew John, and John, the pure of heart, felt the awful presence of the Son of God. And the Son of God stepped down into the river. At once John perceived that He was seeking the humiliation of baptism and strove to prevent Him: " 'I ought to be baptized by Thee, and comest Thou to me?' And Jesus answering said to him: 'Suffer it to be so now. For so it becometh us to fulfill all justice.' Then he suffered Him. And Jesus being baptized, forthwith came out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened to Him: and He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him. And behold a voice from heaven, saying: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' "

This was the first time that the Holy Trinity, one God in Three Persons, showed Itself to men — the Father in the Voice from heaven, the Son in the

Sacred Human Nature, the Holy Ghost in the form of a Dove.

A few weeks went by. It was after Christ's fasting in the wilderness. John saw Jesus approaching and he again gave this solemn testimony, that this was indeed the Messiah who had been marked out by the appointed sign: "Behold the Lamb of God," he exclaimed. "Behold Him who taketh away the sin of the world." To the minds of the Baptist's hearers the words must have connoted many intimations, for the term "Lamb" here addressed to our Savior is replete with meaning. It declared the meek, gentle, innocent character of the Messiah, which had been described by the prophets. "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth," Isaias had said. "But I was like a lamb that is carried to be a victim," Jeremias had sung. The lamb[1] is in numberless passages of the Scriptures fitly chosen as the personification of innocence and gentleness, the leading characteristics of Christ. In calling Him the Lamb of God, direct testimony is given to His Divine Nature. More-

[1] There is something mystical in the Hebrew word for "lambs." *Kebashim* is the term used, and it comes from the verb *Kabbas,* which means to *wash.* "This," Hillel says, "because the two lambs offered every day in the Temple wash *away* the sins of Israel." We cannot follow the great rabbi in his deductions, but the remark is worth being noted as applied to "the Lamb of God who has washed us in His blood."

over, there is in the appellation a direct allusion to His character as the great Paschal Lamb, who through the shedding of His Blood on the Cross, would atone for the world's sin, even as the blood of the lamb long ago had been the sign and symbol of Israel's salvation from Egypt.

"There is a world of meaning in that wondrous sentence, one of the most wondrous in the Bible," says Dr. Breen. "Mankind had waited for thousands of years for these words. A long list of generations had gone down to the grave with their hopes to hear these words. A throb of exaltation must have surged through the Baptist's heart as he pointed to the fulfillment of the world's hopes. What a decisive event in the history of humanity, when John introduced upon the stage Him who broke the soul's thraldom, and took away the curse of death."

As for us, who live no more in anxious expectation, but in the beneficent reality of the Redemption, we know that by His candor and kindness Jesus was indeed the Lamb of God to all who saw Him. And although we do not want to anticipate the events which, three years later, so strangely unfolded themselves on the slopes of Calvary, we cannot forbear reminding ourselves that Jesus let Himself be sold and slain as a Lamb for our salvation.

A day is to come when the Cross, loaded with its precious burden and crimsoned with Divine Blood,

will be heavily jerked into the hole ready to receive it. Jesus, whose heart-strings will crack under the sway, will faintly moan a plaintive moan—the bleating of the Lamb — to which will answer, from the Temple on the hill, the blast of the sacred trumpet announcing the slaying of the symbolic Paschal Lamb. Perhaps some of those who will be there will remember the words of John the Baptist. And perhaps tears of regret will well from their eyes.

Later on, John the Evangelist will see the vision of which he speaks in the Apocalypse. In a mystical ecstasy he will behold Jesus as the Lamb that was slain and that purchased souls for God out of all tribes and nations, that washed them clean in His Blood, and thereby made of them a royal, priestly people; as the Lamb that with His Blood strengthens the Church militant, making it victorious in its combats with Satan; as the Lamb that is the brilliant light of the heavenly Jerusalem, conducting the blessed to the fountains of the waters of life; as the Lamb worthy to receive power and divinity and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and benediction; as the Lamb to whom all creation and all the choirs of angels present praise and adoration.

As the lamb in holy Scripture is a standing symbol of Christ, and as the citizens of heaven bless the Lamb without ceasing, so also does the Church love to invoke Jesus Christ in a simple, touching

manner as "the Lamb of God." Throughout all ages there continues ever to resound in her liturgy this present supplication to the divine, eternal, sacrificial Lamb, who has taken upon Himself the sins of the world and thereby effaced them. As often as she administers Holy Communion to the faithful, she exhorts them in the words of John the Baptist: "Behold the Lamb of God! Behold Him who taketh away the sin of the world!" to realize and value the wealth of grace contained in this heavenly sacrificial food. Almost all her litanies conclude with the solemn invocation to the Lamb of God, "to spare us, to hear us, and to have mercy on us."

The Church has ever been accustomed to represent the Divine Savior both under the figure of the Good Shepherd and also under the symbol of the Lamb; both images are intimately connected with each other. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who became Himself our Sacrificial Lamb on the Cross, and who daily becomes the same again on the altar; He is the Good Shepherd, who gave His life for us and who, with His living flesh and Heart's blood, nourishes us to an eternal life of blessedness.

From the Sacrificial Lamb present on the altar there streams forth salvation and redemption, there flows to us all the favor of God, and all the peace of God. This Lamb that was slain from the beginning of the world and that will be slain unto the end of

the world, we should, during Mass, filled with humility and fervor, adore and invoke in order that we may obtain the fullness of mercy and peace, whereby we shall be prepared for admittance "to the royal banquet of the Lamb."

CHAPTER V

A COUNTRY WEDDING

A few weeks after His Baptism on the banks of the Jordan, Jesus went to a little Galilean village called Cana, that is, "the Reedy Place." He was no longer alone; several of the disciples of John the Baptist, leaving their first master, had followed Him; conquered to His cause, they were to be His co-workers — and co-sufferers.

Here, condescending as indeed He always was, Jesus consented to honor with His presence the marriage of a young couple whom perhaps He had known in Nazareth.

To say it by the way, in those times in the land of Galilee, even as in Greece, nuptial ceremonies began at twilight.

It was the custom "to bear away the bride from home at blushing shut of day," or even later, far on into the night, covered from head to foot in her loose and flowing veil, garlanded with flowers and dressed in her fairest robes. She was heralded by torchlight, with songs and dances, and the music of the drum and flute, to the bridegroom's home. She was at-

tended by the maidens of the village, and the bridegroom came to meet her with his youthful friends. The Talmud has preserved a snatch of one of the songs sung by the bridesmaids and girls as they danced before the bride, on the way to the bridegroom's house. In a free translation it runs something like this:

"Her eyelids are not stained with blue,
Her red cheeks are her own;
Her hair hangs waving as it grew,
Her grace were wealth, alone!"

Now it must be borne in mind that marriage conveyed to the Jews much higher thoughts than merely those of merriment and gaiety. It was looked upon as a sort of sacrament. The pious fasted and prayed before it, confessing their sins. A bridal pair on their marriage day symbolized the union of God with Israel. The bold allegory of the times was that God Himself had spoken the words of blessing over the cup at the union of Adam and Eve when Michael and Gabriel acted as groomsmen, and the choir of angels sang the wedding hymn. And a haggadah, or old saying, sets forth that when Jezebel was eaten by dogs, her hands were spared, because amidst all her wickedness, she had been wont to greet every marriage procession by clapping of hands. A most sacred affair, therefore, was a mar-

riage ceremony, not unworthy of the presence of Christ.

But let us read how St. John in his Gospel relates the story of this plain country wedding which was destined to be the most famous in history.

"And the third day, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee: and the mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the marriage. And the wine running short, the mother of Jesus said to Him: 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her: 'Woman, what is that to Me and to thee? My hour is not yet come.'" (To our ears the expression sounds strange and almost harsh but to Oriental ears they would not. "Woman" was a title of reverence, and "What is it to Me and to thee?" simply meant: "It is no concern of ours"; the literal version of a common Aramaic phrase which is consistent with the most delicate courtesy. And then who knows whether the words were not said with one of those smiles of filial love which can make everything most acceptable to a mother?) "His mother said to the waiters: 'Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye.' Now six stone water-jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding about twenty gallons. Jesus said, 'Fill up the jars with water.' So they filled them to the brim. Then He said, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the manager of the feast.' They did so; and when the manager of the feast tasted the

water which had become wine, not knowing where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn it knew, he called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everybody serves the good wine first, and then the poorer wine after people have well drunk; but thou hast kept the good wine till now.' Jesus performed this, the first of His signs at Cana in Galilee, and His disciples believed in Him."

Jesus at the very outset of His public ministry desires to point out the spirit of His mission. His first testimony about Himself was to call Himself "The Son of Man," and this bore reference to the confession of Nathanael: "Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel." He is the Son of Man as well as the Son of God, and so it pleases Him to mingle with humanity, to share its joys and its sorrows in order to sanctify them, to teach that common life in all its phases may be raised to a religious dignity, to teach also that the loving smile of God, like the tender blue above, looks down on the whole round of existence. In the seclusion of the wilderness John has been an ascetic; he has spoken only of penance and austerity; he has driven guilty souls to him to sow in them the seeds of dread; Jesus with the silken cords of love draws them, even in the midst of banquets and festivities, to sow in them the seeds of love; anywhere, anyhow, a Good Shepherd, He seeks for the lost sheep of mankind. He spiritualizes the humblest duties of life

and sanctifies its simplest incidents, so as to ennoble it as a whole. Human enjoyments He does not disapprove as unholy; His religion is not to thrive on the repression of every cheerful emotion. He mixes with the crowd of men and affects no singularity; He takes part in the innocent pleasures of life, and interests Himself in all that interests men at large, and yet, amidst all, remains the Consecrated One and the Sinless One; *in* the world, by sympathy and active brotherhood, but not *of* it; human in His outward form, but heavenly in His elevation and spirit. On this pattern also He fashions His Church, our Church, the Catholic Church.

And if at times His new disciples, accustomed as they were to hear the echo of the wrath of the Lord from the lips of the man of the desert, are surprised at or take amiss the humaneness of this new Master — understanding not that the law of fear is dead and the law of love is born — then He is ready to establish by a miracle that although He knows how to be condescending and charitable, He is nevertheless the Divine One having authority over all things, "the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in Him corporally."

And today was His first miracle, and today thus with a symbolic purpose did He manifest His glory: "and His Disciples believed in Him."

II

His Disciples believed in Him and in His power of performing miracles. But nowadays, O my sons of the soil, men are found who refuse to give Him such assent. "A miracle is impossible," they cry out. "Possible it may be," others exclaim, "but it cannot be proved scientifically." And they would fain, if Jesus would come back to earth, summon Him to their laboratories, to test Him and judge whether His principles agree with their theories. Fools! They know not what they prattle about. Their presumption, if not blasphemous, were ludicrous. They talk as though it were God's duty — the duty of Him to whom the sea and the mountains are a very tiny thing, and before whose eyes the starry heaven is as but one white gleam in the sky — to explain His method of acting. They talk as though the finite could comprehend the infinite. They deny miracles, they deny their possibility. But as Veuillot has well said, after St. Augustine, speaking of this very miracle of the water changed into wine: "What else do we see done here in an hour than nature does more slowly round the year? The wine which the guests had drunk from the bridegroom's bounty, and possibly from the added gifts of friends, had been slowly matured from the vine by mysterious elaboration, from light, and heat, and

moisture, and by the salts of the earth, none of which had more apparent affinity to it than the water which Jesus transformed. The miracle in nature is not less real or wonderful than that of the marriage feast, and strikes us less only by its being familiar. At the threshold of Christ's miraculous works it is well to realize a fact so easily overlooked. A miracle is only an exercise, in a new way, of the Almighty power we see daily producing the same results in nature. Infinitely varied forces are at work around us every moment. From the sun to the atom, from the stone to the thinking brain and beating heart, they circulate sleeplessly, through all things, forever. As they act and react on each other, the amazing result is produced which we know as nature, but how many mysterious interrelations, of which we know nothing, may offer endlessly varied means for producing specific ends, at the command of God? Nor is there anything more amazing in the works of Christ than in the daily phenomena of nature. The vast universe, embracing heavens above heavens, stretching out into the Infinite — with constellations anchored on the vast expanse like tiny islet clusters on the boundless ocean, is one great miracle. It was wonderful to create, but to sustain creation is itself to create anew, each moment. Suns and planets, living creatures in their endless races, all that the round sky of each planet covers — seas, air, sweeping valleys, lofty mountains, and the million

wonders of the brain and heart, and life, of their innumerable populations, have no security, each moment, that they shall commence another, except in the continual expenditure of fresh creative energy. Miracles are only the momentary intercalation, or rather, insertion, of unsuspected laws which startle by their novelty, but are no more wonderful than the most common incident of the great mystery of nature."

III

But beside the remembrance of a miracle, the presence of Jesus at the wedding of Cana brings home to our heart other precious lessons.

We know nothing of the happy young people who had among their guests the Savior of the world, His first Apostles and His mother, the Virgin Mary; even their name is unknown, because, no doubt, in the thought of the Master, He was there not to favor a special couple, but to institute, honor and sanctify the very sacrament of matrimony. We know of them only one detail, a very simple one, but sublime in its simplicity: they had invited Jesus to their nuptials.

May their example be ever followed, may Jesus be the principal Guest at every Christian marriage! Catholic people have ever accompanied with rejoicings the solemnizations of the sacrament of matri-

mony. Each State in America has its own customs and traditions, which may vary here and there, but there is one point always the same: style, flowers, music, dances, banquets, profusion of gaiety, promises and hopes: well and good they are, but too often the worldly note is too conspicuous while the religious side is neglected. In our parishes it sometimes happens that dissipation enters and invades even the place where the Holy One resides, and then goes on and has full sway during the rest of the day — a day most solemn and sacred, destined to re-echo into the portals of time and eternity.

That such scandal may not happen on your children's wedding day, O fathers and mothers, invite Jesus at their feast of Cana. He will perhaps not perform a miracle for them, but He will tarry with them and keep intact their undying love in the home of their hearts. He will be to them a Guide and an Advisor, a Moderator in hours of joy and a Comforter in the days of pain, ready to appear at the first call, ready to avert from them the sufferings which torture the body and the mournings which tear and try the soul. Without Him there is no purity nor peace; but with Him less heavy will be the burden of the days, less painful the sacrifices of common life, more gladsome the placing of the newborn babe in the cradle of love. His holy and divine presence will avert from them the hideously hellish plague of divorce, which, under the mantle of an

iniquitous legislation, claims to tear asunder what God hath joined together.

Under the fallacious pretext of breaking the chains accepted with joy, but now too binding, it not only wrecks the lives of the individuals who are parties to the scandalous proceedings, but threatens the very existence of civilized society by the inevitable destruction of family life, and gives rise to a generation of men and women wholly devoid of the most essential virtues of good citizenship — reverence for parents, love of home, and respect for authority.

To conclude this chapter I will now quote a few golden rules which I borrow from that widespread, excellent booklet, "How To Get Married":

(1) Both young and old should look upon marriage as a sacred and important state of life.

(2) Young people should avoid long courtships and late marriages.

(3) Parents should never permit children whilst still at school or under eighteen to keep company — or to associate freely with the other sex.

(4) Courting should not be done in secret, or in the late hours of the night. Well-meaning men are not afraid to visit with the whole family or to go home at a reasonable hour.

(5) Married people should bear in mind that neglect of prayers, of regular attendance at Mass, and of frequent reception of the sacraments almost invariably leads to trouble in the family.

(6) Misunderstandings should not be aired among relatives, neighbors, or in public. They should be laid before the pastor before they have gone too far.

(7) Catholics have no right to appeal to the civil courts in any marriage case without getting the previous consent of the Church.

(8) Catholic lawyers should not accept divorce cases without consulting the pastor or some other priest, and non-Catholic lawyers should be urged to do the same.

CHAPTER VI

ON HILLS AND MOUNTAINS

We all love the hills and the mountains. If it were required to name the grandest natural objects upon earth, it is possible that their name would rise to the lips of not a few. In sublimity they take rank with the ocean and the clouds. They were chosen by the Psalmist to typify God's power — "And the strength of the hills is His also." On the one hand, their height, their mass, and the deep planting of their roots in the earth; and on the other, the beauty which rests upon their varied outlines, which clothes their sides and precipices, and lies among the wide valleys and deep glens, mark them out not only as the most conspicuous, but also as among the most attractive objects in the world. Nor is it without design that these grand features of the earth should twine themselves round the affections. Memory lingers over the dim outline of a mountain long after other scenes grouped round its base have faded away; and one can easily understand that the eyes which day by day rest on the familiar hills and mountains must ultimately open up for them a way to the heart. Poets have

always praised their charm and beauty: in magnificent terms, they tell us of the sun sending them at daybreak the first kisses of his light, and coming to rest on them as on a throne of glory; they sing of the clouds of heaven lowering themselves to their summits, where lie ice and snow, inexhaustible reservoirs whence will flow, until the end of time, brooks, creeks, and rivers. Scientists tell us their genesis and their intimate history: "The dry land appeared," they say, "not in level sands forsaken by the surges which those surges might again claim for their own; but in range beyond range of swelling hill and iron rock, forever to claim kindred with the firmament and be companioned by the clouds." Theologians unfold with eloquence the lessons that come from the heights, while historians relate the deeds done on them. Souls given to contemplation have ever longed to live on the hills where the air is purer and heaven is nearer, and where it is easier to commune with God.

It was ever so with Jesus:

> "He always loved the mountain tops, for there
> Away from earth, He treads the mystic ways,
> And sees the vision of the Fairest Fair,
> Heaven dawns upon His raptured gaze;
> The loneliness, the pain, the grief depart;
> Surpassing gladness fills His Sacred Heart."

I do not intend to speak of the events which in

the Old Testament had mountains for their theatre, but before we go with Jesus on the Mount of Beatitudes, we cannot forbear glancing on the contrast between the New Law, the law of love as given on Mt. Kurn Hattin, and the Old Law, the law of fear as proclaimed on Mt. Sinai.

"We think of *that,*" says Farrar, "as a fiery law, whose promulgation is surrounded by the imagery of thunders and lightnings, and the voice of the trumpet sounding long and waxing louder and louder. We think of *this* as flowing forth in divinest music amid all the calm and loveliness of the clear and quiet dawn. That came dreadfully to the startled conscience from an Unseen Presence, shrouded by wreathing clouds, and destroying fire, and eddying smoke; this was uttered by a sweet human voice that moved the heart most gently in words of peace. That was delivered on the desolate and storm-rent hill which seems with its red granite crags to threaten the scorching wilderness; this on the flowery grass of the green hillside which slopes down to the silver lake. That shook the heart with terror and agitation; this soothed it with peace and love. And yet the New Commandments of the Mount of Beatitudes were not meant to abrogate, but rather to complete the Law which was spoken from Sinai to them of old. The Law was founded on the eternal distinctions of right and wrong — distinctions strong and irremovable as the granite bases

of the world. Easier would it be to sweep away the heaven and the earth than to destroy the least letter of that code which contains the very principles of all moral life."

II

Hitherto the Master had not found an audience trained enough in the things from above to understand Him; later on, surrounded by enemies who will spy out every word and step of His, He will not have the same liberty, and will be compelled mostly always when in public to speak in figures or in parables. But today His enemies are not yet harassing Him and pursuing Him everywhere. He can, therefore, open His heart and reveal to the enraptured multitude the treasures of light, love, and life which He had for them.

No less than the time was the scenery appropriate to His own method of oratory, simple and sublime — sublime because simple. Lilies stud the meadows, shrubs bristle with thorns, vines reach out their tendrils to the props, thistles grow at the foot of the fig trees, birds are singing in the air; not very far from here dogs are barking, those dogs to which nothing holy must be given, and swine before which no pearls must be cast are wallowing in the mire; fishermen from the Lake near by are here who will never offer a serpent to their children who want a

fish; yonder is the city built upon the hill, and the mountain-hamlets along whose roads salt that has lost its savor has been thrown away; and the lowly homes with their one candle lit in the evening and put upon a candlestick near the bushel with which they measure corn.

And so on such a day and at such a spot, seeing at His feet the numberless multitude drawn by the tenderness of His Majesty and longing to see Him, Jesus opened His divine lips and uttered the heavenly Beatitudes. Solemnly He proclaimed the code of true worship in spirit and in truth.

"Blessed! Blessed! Blessed!" Belief in bliss offered to all and accessible to all, became with Jesus an article of divine faith.

Until this blessed hour moralists and poets had in lengthy and learned lessons and in exquisitely chiselled lyrics asserted that bliss, human bliss, is found here below only in the midst of honor, riches, and pleasures; few were those who claimed to see it in the midst of duty. And with such masters and guides, humanity that longed for happiness, had discovered that wealth, glory, and mirth were only other words for weariness, disgust, and misery.

And lo! Jesus cried out:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven!

Blessed the meek, for they shall possess the land!

Blessed they that mourn, for they shall be comforted!

Blessed they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall be filled!

Blessed the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy!

Blessed the clean of heart, for they shall see God!

Blessed the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

Blessed they that suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven!"

Thus spoke the God-Man setting, contrary to the moral ideas of antiquity, relative happiness in the lowliness of the present life, and absolute happiness in the joys of the future life; casting aside glory as vain, riches as deceitful, pleasure as wearisome.

And His life was in unison with His moral doctrine: from His birth, through all His acts, constantly He proved that He despised the hollow toys to the pursuit of which mankind rushes; constantly He proved that He had faith in the power of self-sacrifice, poverty and persecutions. Born in a stable He was compelled a few days after that Christmas night to fly into Egypt to escape Herod's hired murderers. And all along His life, in the midst of misery and opposition He proves by His patience and resignation, and last by His Passion that they alone find happiness here below who unfalteringly do the will of God.

Those who have believed in the divine word — the martyrs in the arena, the apostles in pagan lands, the hermits in the wilderness, the virgins in the cloister, all the saints of the New Law, kings or slaves, nobles or peasants — all have said after Him: "Blessed are we in the midst of the afflictions of the passing hour, because thereby we acquire endless glory and happiness." Indeed, how many of them have felt, to a degree unthought of by those whose heart is caitiff or cowardly, what sweetness and what a reward God has in store even here below for those who draw their happiness at the sources shown by Jesus! And when we think that for nineteen centuries the lives of the saints have ever been an illustration of the heavenly Beatitudes, we wonder not that the Church has chosen this fragment of the Gospels as the portion to be read on All Saints' Day.

The Beatitudes are only the prologue. The whole sermon on the Mount we should quote, for it is the code of the new law, the new and last revelation; it is the voice of God, speaking in the utterance of man to one and to all, to the learned and to the unlearned, to the young and to the old; to borrow the image of St. Augustine: "It is a great sea whose smiling surface breaks into refreshing ripples at the feet of our little ones, but into whose unfathomable depths the wisest may gaze with the shudder of amazement and the thrill of love." Invited is the reader to peruse the whole sermon in the family

Bible, for, after all, the actual text *is* different from everything else in the world, and therefore the work is different from what is done by anything else, however excellent in its kind. Just to whet your appetite I will gather here a few morsels:

"You are the salt of the earth. But if salt becomes insipid, what can make it salt again? After that it is fit for nothing, fit only to be thrown outside and trodden by the feet of men.

"You are the light of the world. So is your light to shine before men that they may see the good you do and glorify your Father in heaven.

"Whoever is angry with his brother will be sentenced by God. So if you remember, even when you are offering your gift at the altar, that your brother has any grievance against you, leave your gift at the very altar and go away; first be reconciled to your brother, then come back and offer your gift.

"Be quick and make terms with your opponent, so long as you and he are on the way to court, in case he hands you over to the judge, and the judge to the jailer, and you are thrown into prison; truly I tell you, you will never get out till you pay the last penny of your debt.

"Let what you say be simply 'yes' or 'no'; whatever exceeds that springs from evil.

"You have heard the saying, 'You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute

you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven: He makes His sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love only those who love you, what reward do you get for that?

"Take care not to practice your charity before men in order to be noticed; otherwise you get no reward from your Father in heaven.

"When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so as to keep your alms secret; then your Father who sees what is secret will reward you.

"When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they look woebegone to let men see they are fasting.

"Store up no treasures for yourselves on earth, where moth and rust corrode, where thieves break in and steal: store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor rust corrode, where thieves do not break in and steal.

"No one can serve two masters: either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will stand by the one and despise the other — you cannot serve God and Mammon.

"Judge not, that you may not be judged yourselves, for as you judge so you will be judged, and the measure you deal out to others will be dealt out to yourselves.

"Why do you note the splinter in your brother's

eye and fail to see the beam in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take out the splinter from your eye,' when there lies the beam in your own eye? You hypocrite! take the beam out of your own eye first, and then you will see properly how to take the splinter out of your brother's eye.

"Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you; for everyone who asks receives, the seeker finds, the door is opened to anyone who knocks.

"Whatever you would like men to do for you, do just the same to them.

"It is not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord!' who will get into the realm of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

"Now, everyone who listens to these My words and acts upon them will be like a prudent man who built his house on rock. The rain came down, the floods rose, the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, for it was founded on rock. And everyone who listens to these My words and does not act upon them will be like a stupid man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the floods rose, the winds blew and beat upon that house, and down it fell — with a mighty crash."

No wonder that, when Jesus had finished His address, "the multitudes were astonished at His teaching: for He taught them as one having power, and not as their Scribes and Pharisees"; not as the copy-

ists, interpreters and translators of the Old Law but as the Real Author of the New Laws, destined to last forever.

Verily Jesus has left us not only a life, but a rich world of thoughts, in which all the best inspirations and longings of mankind meet and are reflected. It is the expression of the purest and directest truths which rise in the depth of the soul, and they are made common to all mankind by being uttered in the simplest and most popular form.

CHAPTER VII

BIRDS OF THE AIR AND LILIES OF THE FIELD

"A sparrow lighted chirping on a spray
Close to my window, as I knelt in prayer,
Bowed by a heavy load of anxious care.
The morn was bitter, but the bird was gay,
And seemed by cheery look and chirp to say,
'What though the snow conceals my wonted fare,
Nor I have barn or store-house anywhere?
Yet I trust heaven on a winter's day.'
That little bird came like a winged text
Flutt'ring from out God's Ward to soothe my breast.
What though my life with wintry cares be vexed?
On a kind Father's watchful love I rest;
He meets this moment's need; I leave the next;
And always trusting, shall be always blest."

In the previous chapter there is a passage which I have omitted on purpose and to which I want to return, for, short as it is, therein is found a whole treatise on Divine foreknowledge, or rather a hymn in honor of Divine Providence.

"Be not anxious for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor yet for your body what you shall put on. Is not the life more than the

food, and the body than the raiment? Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not you of much more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto his stature? And why are you anxious concerning raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin. Yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God doth so clothe the grass of the field which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Be not therefore anxious, saying: What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things. But seek you first His righteousness, and His Kingdom; and all these things shall be added unto you. Be not therefore anxious for the morrow; for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

What an invincible confidence in God these words should inspire within us, how well they should remind us that our Father who is in heaven keeps us and preserves us with love and care!

But for the present, since Jesus tells us to behold the birds of the heaven and the lilies of the field, let

us do so at once: for us country folk it will be an easy and pleasant task thus to go through nature to grace.

And, first, we notice the birds possess perfect and most admirable adaptations for buoyancy and flight. Their heads are small, and pierce freely through the air; their vision is keen, and discerns their way-marks and destination and food at great distances; their head and shoulders are gently swelling, and cleave the atmosphere with the least possible resistance; their frame is small, light and curved, and suited alike to ascend into the air and to float on the breeze; their interior has air-bags and cavities which make them almost as buoyant as balloons, and at the same time maintain a very extensive respiration for the double purpose of high heat and lofty vigor; their under-plumage is strong and imbricated or overlapped, and also in most instances lubricated with an oily secretion which protects them from injury by rain or storm; their wings, which are made of a light material, are worked with muscles of very strong power, and strike the air with most impulsive force; and their tail has a relative adjustment similar to the rudder of a ship, but with greater activity and incomparably freer command, and steers them like life, steadily and promptly, in the precise line of their wished-for course. Every feather is a wonder, and every wing a museum.

But birds are also surpassingly beautiful and charming. There are thousands and thousands of kinds, and yet all are lovely, all exhibit an endless diversity of grace and gorgeousness and song. They seem to belong to Eden rather than to this sin-defaced earth, and are suggestive to good men of an everlasting paradise in the heavens. How paramount above all statuary are their forms! How rich above all festoonings and draperies are their waving plumes and feathery ringlets! How glorious above all pictures, how far beyond comparison with anything except flowers and winged insects, are their tints and burnishings of color! And how immensely superior to the rough measures of human music, how entirely like the faint far-away responses of the primal paradise to the hymns of the angels, are the trillings and warblings of their melody!

With Browning, we say:

"Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dewdrops — at the bent spray's edge —
That's the wise thrush; he sings each song twice over
Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture!"

Nor can any strong reason, or scarcely any reason at all, be discovered by physiologists, why birds need such exquisite beauty, or any of their fine hues, or

of their powers of song. They clearly possess all their attractions as a ministry of pleasure to man. They embellish our forests and amuse our walks; and whether we saunter around our home or wander to a distance, some of them always attend us, to please our eyes and ears, and to raise our admiring thoughts to the God of nature and of Providence.

But there is no need to expatiate any longer on the wonders of the birds, for this is not a manual of ornithology. We all know that all birds enjoy organs and instinct necessary to look for, to find out and to seize upon their food: we all know that the general Providence of God provides that they get food.

"Now," as Doctor Breen says, "the love which God has for the creatures cannot be compared to that which He has for man. He made them and all other things in this world for man. He is only the Creator of these; He is the Father of man. He gave to man His own image and likeness; He gave him an immortal soul capable of immortality, capable of knowing and loving God Himself. Nay more, the Word became incarnate for man. Certainly, therefore, that Providence which provides for the birds of the air that have no power to know or love God, that die and are no more, will provide for the being which He has raised to such a dignity, and for whom He has done so much."

Let us note, however, with Dr. Martineau, that

"although our heavenly Father feeds the birds, the birds stay not at home expecting crumbs of manna to drop from rich tables in the skies. They are not found empty of all appetency, regardless of the changing year, and hanging ever upon miracle. On the contrary their whole existence is a continual quest after that physical good which is *their* true and only end; and to pilfer the garden and the field, to skip and sip the stream, to dress their plumage with finer gloss, and sing the song of glad repletion, is their work from morn to night. What eager industry flutters in the spring around the skirts of the plantation, gathering the bits and brakes scattered for them by the winter's storm! What busy preparations, at autumn's first chill wind, wheels and musters overhead, for the long flight over Southern seas, the swift cheering on the slow, and the young supporting the old! What studious watch, under the semblance of flashing sport, does the home-loving swallow keep!"

Like the birds must *we* act. "That which God giveth us we must gather up." "In due season He openeth His hand and filleth with blessing every living creature," but we must work to get that blessing, for we are not here to reign, but to wrestle. God will supply our wants, not without activity of ours, but by means of it; not by casual miracle, but by constant law; by putting His skill *within* us, as well as spreading His affluence without.

II

After the birds come the flowers, the flowers which according to poets, were born from the smile of God upon the earth, and show in freckle, streak or stain some touch of His unrivalled pencil. Listen to Christina Rossetti:

> "Flowers preach to us if we will hear —
> The rose saith in the dewy morn,
> I am most fair;
> Yet all my loveliness is born
> Upon a thorn.
> The lilies say: Behold how we
> Preach, without words, of purity.
> The violets whisper from the shade
> Which their own leaves have made:
> Men scent our fragrance in the air,
> Yet take no heed
> Of humble lessons we would read.
> But not alone the fairest flowers:
> The merest grass
> Along the roadside where we pass,
> Lichen and moss and sturdy weed,
> Tell of His love who sends the dew,
> The rain and the sunshine too,
> To nourish one small seed."

"God clothes the lilies," Alford says, "as never man in his pomp, as never woman in her beauty, was yet bedecked. One of these wayside flowers, if

we could see all the secrets and all the blendings of its colors, if we could penetrate all the laws which regulate the symmetry and elegance of its form, if we could appreciate all the care bestowed by the Creator on the delicacy and complexion of its texture, would put all human adornment to shame. If we try one of these with the power of the microscope — the more we magnify it, the more glories of form and color, the more intricate symmetries of texture astonish the dazzled eye: subject to the same test the most delicately-woven fabric of human skill, the most precise and uniform artificial application of color, and as it expands before the scrutiny, it degenerates into a coarse and unseemly mass, daubed as if by an unskillful hand. He who has lavished all this exquisite skill on the rank growth of the field, which is flourishing today, and cut down and dried up and burnt tomorrow, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Will not He, in His good Providence, bring about for all of us who serve Him and seek to do His will, a sufficient and seemly supply of what is needful and what is becoming for the clothing of the body? We are to trust Him with the sustenance of our lives, we are to trust Him with sheltering and arraying us. We are better employed than that we ought to distrust our thoughts day by day about these matters: we have no time to bestow on them as life's business: they must not eat out the spirit

of a sound and earnest mind — they must not unteach us self-denial, they must not be clamoring when we ought to be listening to the whisper of sympathy and God's spirit: they must not ever be rising as drifts of clouds, troubling the clear morning of the day, and blotting the Sun of Righteousness by whose light we walk and work. This it is, and no impossible, no exaggerated casting away of earthly cares which the Lord requires of us. It is the knowing what we are, and who cares for us, and acting in that knowledge. It is told of Caesar, that being at sea in a storm, and beholding the shipman unmanned with fear, he cried, 'Fear not; thou hast Caesar on board.' This was carrying greatness of soul even to infirmity: it is presumption for a man to put that trust in his fortunes, and to have that confidence in his own work in the world: but it is no undue confidence in us, and it savors of no presumption to say to our anxious souls when they distract us with fear for this life's welfare, 'Fear not: thou carriest a precious spirit bound for the blessed country afar: the Father breathed it into thee, the Son bled for it, the Holy Ghost guideth and sanctifieth it: thou art freighted with covenant promises, and the fruits of a Christian life stored up against the final harvest: be not thou troubled with daily anxieties: only keep thine hands on the helm, and thine eye on the compass, and let the wild waves rage as they will. Seek first the one

great purpose for which thou art, and all things else shall be added unto thee.' "

III

It is sometimes asked whether the doctrine of a special Providence does not threaten the moral well-being of man himself with serious dangers. For instance, is it not likely to encourage a dreamy, listless way of waiting upon events, instead of nerving men to active exertion? Is it not suited to the life of an Oriental mystic rather than, for instance, to the busy life of American farmers, who know that they must exert themselves if they would live? No. Like other teaching, no doubt it may be abused; but between honest, and even eager, attention to business and a sincere recognition of God's Providence there is no necessary contrariety. In our own times, as of old, there are many men whose lives show how perfectly compatible is a childlike faith in God's Providence with uninterrupted exertion; nay, rather how that faith is the very spirit and nerve of this exertion. God does not promise us each and all that if we will lie down by the brook Carith like Elias the Thesbite, the ravens shall come to feed us; as the proverb says, He helps them that help themselves; but then it is He who does help them, and that so materially that they could not do without Him. He kindles the

brain, He nerves the arm, He sustains, through the weary hours of work, the various powers of mind and body; and the product, in one sense due to human exertion, is in a higher and true sense His gift through it. Between our Lord's teaching and such exertion undertaken on the principle of duty, there is no opposition. Our Lord is merely opposing an overanxiety about the results of work, which is often as fatal to successful labor itself as it is to the claims upon the soul's attention of the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Let us then ever trust in God and pray to Him as though everything depended on Him; let us work and wrestle as though everything depended on us.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE WILDERNESS

I

In the beginning of His public career, when Jesus had fasted forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, He felt hungry. So the tempter came up and said to Him: "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." But Jesus answered: "It is written, Man is not to live on bread alone, but on every word that issues from the mouth of God."

We transcribe this episode because of the two-fold lesson therein given us by our Lord. First, from the very words of Jesus we see that, although bread is necessary for the sustenance of our body, it is not sufficient. Our soul also has to be fed: she is hungry for truth, justice, charity, and it is in the granary of the Holy Scriptures and of Tradition as entrusted by God to His Church that she can find such food. The second lesson comes from the very refusal of Jesus to lift up His divine hand for an unnecessary purpose. Christ showered His miracles on those who were lowly and righteous, on

those who showed their misery to Him and appealed to His All-Goodness and His All-Powerfulness. But He never performed a single "sign" to satisfy mere curiosity. Nor did Christ ever perform a miracle for His own needs: He who made the water wine, could have made the stones bread; but to *that* He was solicited by the need of others, to *this* only by His own. And this abstinence of self-help was the law of His whole life, a life as wonderful in the miracles which it left undone as in those which it wrought.

II

In the last year of His public life Jesus went again into the wilderness. He was surrounded by a great multitude of men, who had brought all the sick who could be carried, or who could come; and as He passed through the crowds He healed them by a word or a touch. They had greater wants, however, than bodily healing, and He could not let them go away uncomforted. Ascending the hillside, and gathering the vast throng before Him, "He spoke to them of the Kingdom of God, and taught them many things."

The day was spent in this arduous labor, but the people still lingered. They had been fed with the bread of truth, and seemed indifferent, for the time, to anything besides. Poor shepherdless sheep!

It was His delight, as the Good Shepherd, to lead them to rich pastures, and as they sat and stood around Him, they forgot their bodily wants in the beauty and power of His words.

"It was now towards evening and the company showed no signs of dispersing. Food could not be had in that lonely place, and the Twelve, afraid on this and perhaps other grounds, anxiously urged Jesus to send them away, that they might buy bread in the country round. To their astonishment, however, He told them they must themselves supply food, as it would never do to dismiss them hungry: they might faint by the way. No more impossible request could have been made. About two hundred dollars worth of bread, at the value of money in those days, would be needed to give each even an insufficient share. They could not understand Him. Andrew, perhaps the provider for the band, could only demonstrate their helplessness by saying that the lad in attendance on them had only five loaves of common barley bread — the food of the poor — and two small fishes, but what, he added, were they among so many?

"Make the men sit down," said Jesus. It was Nisan (April), the month of flowers, and the slopes were rich with the soft green of the spring grass — that simplest and most touching lesson of the care of God for all nature. The Twelve presently divided the vast multitude into companies of fifties

and hundreds, reminding St. Peter, long after, from the bright color of their Eastern dresses, of the flower beds of a great garden.

"This done, like the great Father of the far-stretching household, Jesus took the bread and the fishes, and looking up to Heaven, invoked the blessing of God on them, and giving thanks for them, as was customary before all meals, proceeded to hand portions to the disciples, who, in turn, gave them to the crowd. Thus Christ, from three loaves and two small fishes, not only satisfied the hunger of five thousand men, besides women and children, but did it so royally that the fragments that remained were enough to fill twelve of the little baskets in which Passover pilgrims were wont to carry their provisions for the way. More was left than there had been at first.

"Jesus had thus supplied the wants of the needy in a way the full significance of which was as yet beyond what the disciples either understood or dreamed, for He had shown how there dwelt in Him a virtue sufficient to meet all higher wants, as well as the lower, so that none who believed in Him would ever have either hunger or thirst of soul any longer, but would find in Him their all. Had they known it, He had shown them that He Himself was the Bread of Life, that came down from heaven. But they at least knew how much they came short of a lofty faith, which in loving trust despairs least

when the need is greatest, and in the strength of which all is doubled by joyful imparting, while abundance remains instead of want."

This miraculous bread, symbol of the Holy Eucharist, recalls an incident in the life of Israel which it is meet to mention.

With the help of God the Hebrews had crossed the Red Sea and entered the wilderness of Sur. "Let us sing unto the Lord," they exclaimed, "for He has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider He has thrown into the sea. The depths have covered them: they are sunk to the bottom like a stone."

But, alas! how quickly do their groans of complaint follow their hymn of gratitude! Straightway we read in the Bible that the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, their leaders: "Would to God that we had died by the hand of the Lord," they cried out, "in the land of Egypt, where we sat over the flesh pots, where we did eat bread to the full. Why have you brought us into this desert, that you might destroy all the multitude with famine?"

God did not punish them. Once more He forgave them and had pity on them. He said to them, through Moses, that He would rain bread for them, and they would see the glory of the Lord. "And in the morning the dew lay round about the camp,

and when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness a small round thing, small as the hoar-frost on the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, What is it? For they knew not what it was. And Moses said unto them, It is the bread which the Lord hath given you to eat."

Strengthened by this food (manna), they went on and on. Every morning they gathered it as a food for the day, until they reached the Promised Land.

As the Father, so the Son with the Holy Ghost. God has ever pity on humanity. In the heart of God, unweary and unweariable, lies an eternal commiseration for us. "Come to Me all ye who are laboring and burdened, and I will refresh you." Thus has the Divine Spokesman and the Living Word issued His call to us all, because He knew there was in His soul love enough to comfort, light enough to enlighten, strength enough to help all those who are threatened and tormented by doubt, despondence and despair.

O my farmers, with that childlike confidence which is both the bud and blossom of our belief, let us ever approach Jesus, the Divine Friend who stays with us when all others forsake us, the Friend who has both the desire and the power to help us. Your hunger and thirst of soul and body He will ever satisfy. Your crops He will ever bless. He is

the All-Good as well as the All-Mighty: "even the desert land He will make as a place of pleasure, and as the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of praise."

CHAPTER IX

DOVES AND SERPENTS

I

"Be ye wise as serpents and simple as doves." Such are the words of our Lord which we cull again from that inexhaustible store-house of wisdom and simplicity, the Sermon on the Mount.

Of all the feathery denizens of the mid-air the dove has perhaps been given the best part. Gentle and graceful, with her delicate forms and her pretty plumage, she seems made to be a harbinger between heaven and earth. She cuts speedily through the air, and in those trackless fields of space she knows how to hover as perfectly as an eagle. She can be tamed easily and she then becomes the pet bird of the farm. Children play with her and caress her. Timid, however, and trembling, she takes flight at the least noise and flying away she goes for calm and peace in higher regions. Soon she comes down again, she stays here a while on the top of a rock or of a tree, or comes to dip her wings in the clear water of a brook or a creek. Her song has nothing of those fanciful melodies which we admire in other

birds and which cheer up the fields of nature, but her cooing, half celestial and half earthly, with its low, long note, is not without a charm of its own, and the nameless things that sigh within us answer to her plaintive and affectionate ring.

Because of her appealing qualities she has been chosen as the symbol of the spirit of gentleness, innocence, simplicity, candor, holiness that soars above, and charity that labors here below.

Holy Writ mentions the dove in many a passage. She announces the end of the deluge to Noe when she returns to him in the evening "carrying a bough of an olive tree, with green leaves, in her mouth"; she is the tiny victim offered in the Temple for their purification by the mothers that are poor; therefore was she the victim offered by the Blessed Virgin Mary; luminous she descends on the head of the baptized Messiah in the holy stream of Jordan.

What more shall I say or sing of her? She loves the light of day, she flies straight to the object she has in view, she is trustful, she is patient, so patient that I have seen a sparrow pick food from her bill, and there she was, using neither beak nor her claws to avenge herself. She prefers to be the anvil rather than the hammer, the spoiled rather than the robber, the slain rather than the murderer, the martyr rather than the tyrant. Do what you want, she says, but it is better to be good and simple than curious, malicious, and cunning, and there is such

a thing as the duty of allowing our goods to be taken from us, rather than defending our rights when evil may result therefrom, knowing that a better inheritance is reserved for us. Verily this dove is an eloquent preacher of Christian simplicity. And no wonder that our Lord tells us to be "simple as doves" who also told us that unless we become as little children we shall not enter the Kingdom of heaven.

But what is Christian simplicity?

Faber says that it is truthfulness with ourselves, with our neighbor, and with God. St. Francis de Sales calls it sincerity in language and manners. Blanlo speaks of it as a holy disposition of the soul tending to unity, and shunning all duplicity in intention, affection, word, and action. Others tell us that it is a freedom from elaborateness, ornaments, formality, artfulness, cunning, affection or pretension, and ostentation. But the simplest definition is that which I heard from a little Kentucky girl: "Simplicity," she said, "is simplicity," thereby telling me that it is better to practice it than to know its definition.

The ways of simplicity indeed we may learn from glancing at the souls of small children as we know them. Simple in their beliefs and their judgments, they willingly defer to the opinions of others, and never hotly maintain their own. It is thus that a follower of Christ must prefer the judgment of

others to his own and ingenuously confess his error as soon as he recognizes it. With still greater reason he adheres simply to the truth of faith: the feeling of his own ignorance disposes him to believe; his is truly the faith of the peasant. Simple in his conduct, a child avoids disguise and falsehood; he does not know what it is to be annoyed at a want of consideration, or to be proud at a proof of attention; he does not occupy himself with what is thought or said of him; he does not trouble himself about where his mother places him or carries him, nor about anything she does to him; he only knows how to abandon himself simply to her and to allow her to do with him what she pleases, because he knows she is — his mother. It is thus that the true Christian acts in all things, without dissimulation or concealment, without duplicity or artifice, without falsehood or equivocation. He does not try to hide either his ignorance or his faults, or to excuse himself when he has failed in his duty, nor to show himself to be anything but what he is; and, caring little as to what others may say or think of him, he goes straight on his way, doing what he believes to be his duty. In his exterior he is modest without being singular; discreet without affectation; he knows nothing either of extravagance in dress, or in food, furniture and amusements. In the midst of his social duties, politeness is in his case the true expression of charity. In studying

his way of action, you notice, not only that he wants to please, but that you are really dear to him; not that he aims at others being pleased with him, but that he is pleased with those with whom he comes into contact. Again, in the details of his actions, he does not seek to show or hide himself, nor to appear good, but to be the same in private as in public, at home as in the street — always himself. He fears nothing with excess, he desires nothing with passion, he is poor without being humiliated, rich or honored without esteeming himself any the more for it; he knows of nothing low in what is good, nothing little in what is useful, nothing honorable in what is un-Christian. A beautiful character this is, and you will attain to it in willing the will of God and nothing else, in blessing God always for everything and in reposing upon Him in the simplicity of love.

Simplicity of love! The whole Bible is studded with the proofs of how deeply God loves it. "His will is in them that walk sincerely," is an expression we find so often that we could call it the burden of the divine song. Simplicity in charity, simplicity in obedience, simplicity in the fulfillment of the duties of our state, simplicity in perseverance, simplicity in our relations with one another.

But now let us consider the serpent.

Serpents are beasts that have only enemies and therefore everywhere run great danger. So they

are very wary, they keep guard over themselves, they avoid making noise, they turn around any obstacle that they find on their way. They never storm a place, they slimily insinuate themselves into it. And in all this, in cases of passive resistance as well as active attack, they follow an instinct dictated by prudence.

In the primeval days of the human race the serpent was cursed by God because of his having deceived Adam and Eve; and our Lord echoed that malediction when He lashed the hypocrite Pharisees by calling them "serpents and offspring of vipers."

Indeed everything is deceptive in those reptiles, and the very uttering of their name seems to distort our lips.

Seen from near there is no doubt that in many instances wonderful are their gorgeous colorings and their diversified forms, but they are all in some way or other hideous, they are the ugliest creatures upon the earth, and the beauteous ones look all the more horrible for their very beauty.

You see them at rest; you would believe them doomed to inertia, those snakes of the swamps; they have no feet, no fins, no wings. They have no exterior members adapted for making progress. How can they move? The fact is that thanks to the suppleness of their spine, by drawing together the ribs on alternate sides, they spring, they leap,

they bound, they climb, they glide, not merely with ease, but with alacrity.

You see their size, relatively small, and you believe they are frail and harmless. But all are more or less remarkable for strength and noxiousness. Some are sheathed in ball-proof coat of mail covered with imbricated scales; others have offensive power of teeth or muscle which can promptly crush a middle-rate beast or man himself to a mummy; others eject acrid humors or fetid odors most disgustingly vile; and others carry stings and poison-bags, and can in a moment inflict on man or on any large animal a dangerous or deadly wound.

"Flee the serpent as Satan," is consequently a universal adage, but how shall we conciliate it with the saying of Christ: "Be prudent like serpents"? Is there not a flagrant contradiction between them? No, there is not, and easily do they justify each other.

If the serpent is crafty, it behooves us to mistrust his malice, remembering the word of St. Paul: "I fear lest, as the serpent seduced Eve by his subtility, so your minds should be corrupted, and fall from the simplicity which is in Christ."

But if he is prudent and cautious, why should we not imitate this good point of his?

Prudence is usually "the virtue of old folks," but it is a moral virtue only inasmuch as it differs from duplicity. It must, therefore, be accompanied

with simplicity. In the Catechism its definition is: Prudence is a virtue dictating what, in a particular case, is best to be done, to act according to God's will.

When I speak of prudence, I do not mean that worldly-wise virtue that seems to be at home and do its work best in the things of this world of sense and time; that knows how to invest money advantageously, or to make a good match, or to conduct a delicate negotiation, or to smooth down a rising misunderstanding, or to build up the fortune of a family, or to profit adroitly by other men's mistakes. Such prudence deserts a party or abandons an opinion, we are told, when it shows symptoms of becoming unpopular; it makes friends in opposite camps and is prepared for contingencies; it knows how to disown, how to attach itself, at the critical moment; how to take advantage of the tide in human affairs which leads to fortune.

Such prudence is not necessarily dishonest: God forbid! But it also is not characteristically disinterested; it is on the lookout for a passing advantage; it has, as we say, a constant eye to the main chance. "And yet," as Liddon says, "this earthly prudence is the degradation and caricature of a great and noble virtue. Prudence is in man what Providence is in Almighty God. His 'never-failing Providence,' as we know, 'ordereth all things both in heaven and earth.' Nothing takes Him by

surprise; nothing places Him at a disadvantage: He has foreseen, or rather, He sees all, and is ready for the possible as well as the actual. Immeasurable, indeed, is the distance between the Infinite Mind and ours: but in such measure as man can anticipate the future accurately and make due provision for it, he reflects in his little sphere the all-embracing Providence of God. Only why should this foresight be exerted only among the things of the world, when there is awaiting it so much vaster and nobler a field in which to exercise itself? Why should it be as true, as it indisputably is, that 'the children of the world are in their generation more prudent than the children of light'?"

The ideal will ever consist in knowing how to blend the sincerity of childhood with the experience of old age, the simplicity of the dove with the prudence of the serpent. Let us be simple enough never to deceive others; prudent enough not to let ourselves be deceived by others, or misled by our own opinions.

Cowper said it well:

> "That thou mayest injure no man, dove-like be;
> And serpent-like, that none may injure thee."

CHAPTER X

TREES

"I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.
A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;
A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;
A tree that may in Summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;
Who intimately lives with rain.
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree."

JOYCE KILMER

Several times, the vine, the fig tree, the mustard shrub, the reed, etc., are mentioned by our Lord. It was His habit, whether speaking intimately with His Disciples, or addressing the crowd, to draw His comparisons from the field of nature. Although He ever had all men in view, it seems that His words were specially for country people, so fond was He in His Divine teaching to use expressions employed

by farmers. A sower or a shepherd noticed along the mud road, a herd of cattle thick-nibbling through the clovered vale, a wheat field expanding its useful beauty, a bird, a gnat or a chicken suggested to Him images appropriate to engrave lessons into the mind of His hearers.

St. John the Baptist, when pointing out the necessity of bringing forth fruits worthy of penance, had spoken of the axe laid to the root of the trees: when He wants to ward off His Apostles from the hypocrite Pharisees whose heartless religion is but a mask Jesus also says to them: "Beware of false prophets. By their fruits you shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so, every good tree yieldeth good fruit, and the bad tree yieldeth bad fruit. A good tree cannot yield bad fruit; neither can a bad tree yield good fruit. Every tree that yieldeth not good fruit, shall be cut down, and shall be cast into the fire. Wherefore, by their fruits you shall know them."

Later on, on the very road to Calvary, a few hours before His death, seeing some women who cried out and bewailed Him, Jesus said to them: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me but for yourselves and for your children! For there are days coming when the cry will be 'Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never have borne, and the beasts that never have suckled!' Then will people say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills,

'Cover us.' For if this is what they do when the wood is green, what will they do when the wood is dry?" He meant this: if the wood rich with sap and hope is thus pitilessly thrown into the fire, how much more so will they burn the wood which is lifeless and therefore holds no promise of flowers and fruits; if the Son of Man sprinkled with waters of grace; nay, more, if the Son of God is thus condemned to death because He has become the ransom of mankind, what will become of the poor Christian who, despising his baptism, through sin gives himself to Satan and rejects the divine life that is in him? Or again: if in the fulfillment of God's purposes the Holy and the Innocent must suffer thus — if the green tree be thus blasted — how shall the dry tree of a wicked life, with its abominable branches, be consumed in the uttermost burning?

John the Baptist was not "one of those reeds shaken with the wind." He was stabbed with the sword; but on that night of the Herodian revel, standing up for the truth of God, death found him, standing up and crying out: "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife."

Jesus not one moment quailed before the menace of men, but Master of Himself and of all elements, with His mission of justice He united a mission of peace and love: ever kind and condescending, tender and patient, ever merciful, "the bruised reed He

never broke and the smouldering fire He never put out."

In the red hours of His Passion, His murderers, plaiting a crown of thorns, will set it upon His head and will put a reed in His right hand and will bow the knee before Him in mockery. The acanthine crown will be His only crown on earth, and the reed His only sceptre.

But this is not the time to deal with those mournful events. I pass them over and I merely point out the parable of the mustard seed, symbol of the Church Catholic which the Christ was to found: "The Kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man takes and sows in his field. It is less than any seed on earth, but when it grows up it is larger than any plant; it becomes a tree so large that the wild birds come and roost in its branches.

Near the fig tree and the vine we will tarry a while longer.

Twice, in a parable and in a miracle Jesus used the fig tree to teach us a divine lesson.

"A man," He said, "had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; he came in search of fruit on it but he found none. So he said to the vinedresser, 'Here have I come for three years in search of fruit on the fig tree without finding any; cut it down;

why should it take up space?' But the man replied: 'Leave it for this year, sir, till I dig round about it and put in manure. Then it may bear fruit next year. If not, you can cut it down.' "

From several viewpoints a fig tree is the image of man. Alone of all fruit trees it never shows its flowers, which remain concealed with the succeeding nutlets or seeds in the cavity of hollow stalk. The fig tree, therefore, is every one of us, since our intentions which must blossom and ripen into acts are hidden in the secrecy of our heart, our works only being visible.

Our Lord said it elsewhere: "I have chosen you that you should bring forth fruits." These fruits are the good deeds which we perform, the virtues we practice, the temptations we reject, the charitable words we utter, the good example we give, the works of spiritual and corporal mercy we accomplish, the fervent prayers which ascend from our heart towards the Heart of God. But how often, alas! in spite of appealing calls of the Lord we become as fruitless as the fig tree of the Gospel. God has placed us in His own vineyard — the Church; He has flooded us with His love, covered us with His grace, guarded us against the dangers from within and the trials from without. He has indeed the right to expect fruits from us, but when for many weary months and years He has vainly waited for them, how can we be surprised if He

complains of our carelessness and threatens to punish our sluggishness? Many pagans would have become great saints if they had received even only a small portion of the grace which has come to us from heaven! Many heretics would work for the glory of God and the uplift of their brethren if they had been enlightened, sustained, encouraged as we were. And, pray, do not say that the means are not always at hand. There is no Christian soul, no matter how lowly, that has not the right, nay, the duty, to beg for God's help and mercy, none that cannot rise again and again through the means of Penance, none that cannot find again and always strength and energy through the means of Holy Communion. No doubt, seeing how worthless and wicked we are, God could condemn us today to death. But He tarries in His patience because His Son, the Vinedresser, intercedes for us. Blessed are we if, moved by these new favors and grateful for the granted respite, we resolutely start to work, and make up for the wasted time.

The Gospel does not say what became of the fig tree when the vinedresser's request having been granted, he dug about it and dunged it. But here is what happened on another day, on Monday in Passion week.

Jesus was going from Bethania to Jerusalem with His Disciples while it was still early; and on the way He felt hungry. It may be that in His com-

passionate eagerness to teach His people, He had neglected the common wants of life; it may be that there were no means of procuring food in the fields where He had spent the night. But whatever may have been the cause, Jesus hungered, so as to be driven to look for wayside fruit to sustain and refresh Him for the day's work.

"At a distance in front of Him, Jesus caught sight of a solitary fig tree, and although the ordinary season at which figs ripened had not yet arrived, yet, as it was clad with verdure, and as the fruit of a fig sets before the leaves unfold, this tree looked more than usually promising. Its rich large leaves seemed to show that it was fruitful, and their unusually early growth that it was not only fruitful but precociously vigorous. But when He came up to it, He was disappointed. The sap was circulating; the leaves made a fair show; but of fruit there was none. Fit emblem of a hypocrite whose external semblance is a delusion and sham — fit emblem of the nation in which the ostentatious profession of religion brought forth no "fruit of good living" — the tree was barren. And it was hopelessly barren; for had it been fruitful the previous year, there would still have been some of the autumn figs hidden under those broad leaves; and had it been fruitful this year, the spring figs would have set into green and delicious fragrance before the leaves appeared; but on this fruitless

tree there was neither any promise for the future, nor any gleaning from the past. And therefore, since it was but deceptive and useless, a barren cumberer of the ground, He made it the eternal warning against a life of hypocrisy continued until it is too late, and, in the hearing of His Disciples, uttered upon it the solemn fiat, "Never fruit grow upon thee more!" Even at the word, such infructuous life as it possessed was arrested, and it began to wither away.

"At first glance, the severity of Jesus may seem strange — and indeed this is the only occasion when He used His destructive power on earth — but He was the Master. To Him all the trees of the world would be too little for a burnt-offering — and the reason of His act was that He desired to impress three eternal lessons upon His Disciples and upon us: a symbol of the destruction of impenitence, a warning of the peril of hypocrisy, an illustration of the power of faith. And to say it by the way, even this incident was prophesied through Ezechiel where we read: 'All the trees of the country shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, and exalted the low tree, and have dried up the green tree.'

"On the following morning Jesus, who had spent the night outside Jerusalem, rose with His Apostles to enter for the last time the Courts of the Temple. On their way they passed the solitary fig tree, no

longer gay with its false, leafy garniture, but shrivelled from the root upwards, in every bough. The quick eye of Peter was the first to notice it, and he exclaimed, 'Master, behold the fig tree which Thou didst curse, is withered away.' The Disciples stopped to look at it, and to express their astonishment at the rapidity with which the denunciation had been fulfilled. Jesus told them that if they would but have faith in God, unwavering, unstaggering faith, they should not only be able to perform such a wonder as done to the fig tree, but even greater than this."

But since in this one instance the power had been put forth to destroy, He added an important warning. They were not to suppose that this emblematic act gave them any license to wield the sacred powers which faith and prayer would bestow on them, for purposes of anger or revenge; nay, no power was possible to the heart that knew not how to forgive, and the unforgiving heart could never be forgiven. The secret of successful prayer was faith; the road to faith in God lay through pardon of offences. Here are the very words of Jesus as recorded by St. Mark. I re-echo them because they are the charter of faith and forgiveness: "Have the faith of God. Amen, I say to you, that whosoever shall say to this mountain, 'Be thou removed and cast into the sea,' and shall not stagger in his heart, but believe that whatsoever he saith shall be

done: it shall be done unto him. Therefore I say unto you, all things whatsoever you ask when ye pray, believe that you shall receive: and they shall come unto you. And when you shall stand to pray, forgive if you have aught against any man, that your Father also who is in heaven, may forgive you your sins. But if you will not forgive, neither will your Father that is in heaven, forgive you your sins."

'Twas on the night before He died, a few moments after the Last Supper, a few hours before His being betrayed by Judas.

Jesus went forth to Gethsemani, and crossing the vineyards which He had so often compared to the Kingdom of heaven He said to His Disciples: "I am the true Vine and My Father is the Husbandman. Every branch in Me not bearing fruit He will lop off: and every one bearing fruit He will prune that it may bear more fruit. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the Vine; you the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same beareth fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone abide not in Me, he will be lopped off like the branch which withereth, and they will gather it up, and cast it into the fire, and it is burnt up."

How perfectly the Disciples understood these words, and lived and died united to their Lord, we all know. But we must do as they did. We must strive to remain united to Jesus, the head of the mystical body, whose members we are. Without Him, apart from Him, we can acquire no merit for heaven. Let us then keep preciously in our hearts the grace of God that was inserted into us on the day of our baptism which made us the children of the Father; enriched and enlarged on the day of our first Communion, which was the day of our fellowship with Jesus; enriched and strengthened on the day of our Confirmation, which was the day of our Communion with the Holy Ghost.

Let us meditate also on the helpful role of suffering. Pain is to us the pruning of the vine. No pain, no gain. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." "As you are partakers of the sufferings, so shall you be also of the consolation." Through the cross to the light. Through sorrow to the stars. The tree of the cross is ever redolent with a balm most sweet. Our woes are wings that carry us heavenwards.

Let us remember that our self-interest demands that we never leave unproductive any of the branches of our vine — any of our God-given faculties. Even as the vine is not cultivated for the sake of its shade, not for its flowers, nor for its wood, but for its grapes, so are we not placed and planted here below

for the purpose of making money and getting honors and pleasures, but merely to bear fruits for eternal life. The rest is vanity.

The Lord said to Ezechiel: "Son of man, of what use to thee is the wood of the vine tree? Canst thou make any work of it? Shall a pin be made of it to hang any vessel thereon? Behold, it is meet for no work but to be cast into the fire for fuel." O my friends, let us not be the branches of the vine, merely meet for fuel, but let us bear the fruits of living faith, strong hope, and warm love of God and man.

CHAPTER XI

ABOUT ANIMALS

"I am so glad He loved the common things,
The drowsy chicks beneath their mother's wings;
Tall lilies nodding at the folk that pass,
The handiwork of God among the grass.
The sparrows and their brothers of the air,
Content to look to heaven for food and care.
He loved to stray by woods and singing rills,
Companion of the stars and solemn hills.
His friends He chose from men of low degree,
Tillers of land and toilers of the sea.
These things are written on the sacred page,
A star to simple folk from age to age.
And as the glowing words of love we scan,
We feel His kinship to the heart of man."

When we went to the stable of Bethlehem to adore our Divine Savior, we saw an ox and an ass near the Crib of the Child.

During His fast of forty days, Jesus was in the company of wild beasts, while angels ministered to Him.

During the three years of His public life it happened at times that He was so poor as to have no place to lay His head. Reduced to such stern cir-

cumstances, He likened Himself to the foxes, who at least have their holes.

In the hour of His transitory triumph on Palm Sunday it was upon the foal of an ass that He entered Jerusalem in the midst of an enthusiastic crowd. Men and women then spread out their cloaks to tapestry His path, while others cut branches from the trees to scatter them before Him. And the joyous strain of hosannas rose high in the heavens:

"Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed be He who comes in the Name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the Highest!"

And the Apostles recalled in after days that this fulfilled the prophecy of Zacharias: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee; He is meek and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass."

Not upon a war-horse did Christ ride, but on that lowly beast which was the symbol of peace. Simplicity is always the keynote of His acts. His Disciples He sometimes compares to defenceless and guileless lambs: "Behold, I send you as lambs among wolves." He tells them, "to beware of false prophets who come to you in the clothing of sheep but in-

wardly are ravening wolves." He tells Peter "to feed His lambs and feed His sheep."

As for Him He is "the hen gathering her chickens under her wings." It was only in a cursory way that He used this strange and simple comparison, but as it was during a moment of deepest emotion that He had recourse to this charming image we will tarry a while before it.

Towards the very end of His life on earth, after having hurled at the Scribes and Pharisees those maledictions which are the woeful counterpart of the heavenly Beatitudes, His thought and His heart turned towards the Holy City so tenderly loved by Him and so soon to be guilty of the greatest of all crimes. And He wept over it!

"O Jerusalem! Jerusalem!" He cried, in a loud voice trembling with sadness, "thou that killest the prophets and stonest those whom God sends unto thee! Thou art still true to thine evil repute! How often would I have gathered together thy children as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings. But thou wouldst not!"

Jesus, stooping to compare His vigilant and devoted love for us poor sinners, to the touching attention of a hen for her chicks! What an admirable lesson!

I suppose that all the creatures of God manifest for their offspring a certain tenderness blended with

care and anxiety. But is not the hen in the very first rank of them all? While I am writing this page, I can see a hen from my window. Come and hear how her voice is raucous and tremulous, see how her feathers bristle up, see how her wings enfold and extend themselves to offer a ready shelter to her chicks: it is going to rain, and she is very uneasy, she is apprehensive of every step — and how she clucks, clucks, clucks to her chicks now that she has found a dainty morsel of cabbage. But listen again, the scene changes:

"Says the first little chicken
With a queer little squirm:
'I wish I could find
A fat little worm!'

"Says the next little chicken
With a small sigh of grief:
'I wish I could find
A green little leaf!'

"Says the third little chicken
With a faint little moan:
'I wish I could find
A small gravel stone!'

" 'Now, see here,' says the mother
From the green garden patch;
'If you want any breakfast,
Just come here and scratch!' "

But no, this is only pseudo-poetry. The truth of the matter is that the hen is going to scratch and to tear up that patch of potatoes; at least I am afraid that she will. At all events you can see that she is a good mother and a good provider.

And what of her devotion? She forgets herself, she is willing to sacrifice her whole being for her little ones. Not one moment does she stop "thinking" of their welfare and their safety. Her whole life is wrapped up with them. Let an enemy appear, and she displays such a surprising courage that Lincoln could say: "If you have never seen a hen defend her chicks, then you have no idea of what heroism is."

While she is not a mother, she is shy and scary, and she is very awkward and unwieldy. But when the hatching is done and the brood is there, see how she is changed. She watches over them with a vigilance that nothing can weary and a steadfastness that nothing can disconcert. At the least sign of danger she clucks, clucks, to get them under her wings. For them she is ready to accept the battle with man or beast. Unhesitatingly she stands athwart the path of danger. A man who would display the tenth part of the heroic devotedness the hen has for her progeny should hold a place of honor during life, and have his statue near the court-house of his native country-seat after death.

Tender love and protecting care, heroic courage;

it is enough to read the life of our Divine Savior, or to sum up in our mind all that we owe to Him since our baptism and our first Communion, to acknowledge that such are always the sentiments of Jesus towards us.

Let us not act like the unhappy Jews of Jerusalem: let us go to Him, in the hour of joy as in that of sadness, when we need light, strength, and consolation. Let us go to Him with confidence and love. It is so good to nestle near His Heart and before His eyes! No enemy will ever dare attack us in that fortress of love. Doubt, temptations, anguish will be swept away as soon as we are near Him.

During the night of the Passion the cock gives us a lesson of self-vigilance.

"This night," Jesus said to St. Peter, "before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice."

Needless to describe the scenes of the Apostle's profession of fidelity, his denial before the break of day, his bitter tears of a whole lifetime, but let the song of the cock be a warning that we must not trust ourselves, that we must pray for help, that we must repent for our sins, and that we must be ever on our guard "for the lord of the house cometh whether at even, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning."

In another page of the Scriptures Jesus calls the Pharisees "blind guides who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel." Why such a connection between the smallest of all living things, and the camel, the largest of the animals with which the Hebrew mind was familiar? Well, if we remember that in Palestine, wine, water, milk or any beverage was strained or filtered, before drinking, lest a fly or a gnat might have fallen into it and made it "unclean," the language of our Lord becomes clear, although figurative. The straining out of the gnat is the close attention to the minute details of externalism, such as, for instance, the Pharisaic command not to kill a louse on the Sabbath. The swallowing of the camel is their violation of the great principles of the worship of God in spirit, of justice, of truth and of mercy.

Some scrupulous people there are who would never dare miss a certain vocal prayer which they are in the habit of saying every day, — and it is very well — but feel no pang of conscience in speaking against their neighbor and even against their pastor — and it is very bad. They will never steal a penny but they do not pay their debts. They will never pluck an ear of corn in the field but they will filch from you your good name. They will never play baseball on Sunday but they will condone divorce and its accessories. They pray to God for tem-

poral favors but they never ask for the spiritual ones. They seek for the things that should be added unto them, but they seek not the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. They strain out the gnat; they make much of the tiny offence that they have received from others; and they consider as nothing the unkind remarks that they have injected against others. They see the mote that is in their brother's eye but consider not the beam in their own eye. They strain out the gnat and swallow the camel.

With the rich people who loved their riches — the rich who were not poor in spirit — Jesus' language is not less enigmatic than with the Pharisees. He says to them that "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God."

Many explanations have been embroidered on this text. Long ago Cyril of Alexandria, to solve the difficulty, claimed that the Greek word *kamelos*— camel — ought to be changed into *kamilos* — rope or cable. But the words of the Lord cannot be modified. "Another opinion," says Dr. Breen, "was advanced by those who understood by the eye of the needle one of the small gates of Jerusalem, through which a loaded camel could not pass. But it has been clearly proved that no such name was ever given to any gate of the Holy City, and the

idea is incongruous. No reasonable man would thus employ speech. The simile would be clumsy and without point. Now these violent theories are unnecessary. The Lord simply used one of the proverbial expressions of His people's language. It is a hyperbole, and its character was intended by Jesus to add emphasis. Sometimes the elephant was used instead of the camel; the shape of the camel's body and the awkwardness of its movements make it a fit subject for the proverb. Comparisons of such nature are not to be taken literally. The intent of the Lord was to fix upon the minds of men the idea of the great difficulty of serving God in wealth, and for this the expression is apt."

Father Breen may be right, but there are others who think that our Lord goes further than this, and means nothing less than that those who love their riches and trust exclusively in them cannot enter heaven. St. Paul seems to be of the same opinion when he says: "They that desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Nay, the words of our Lord confirm this, too, for when the Apostles said to Him: "Who, then, can be saved?" He simply replied: "With men it is impossible, but not with

God, for all things are possible with Him." Again, according to Him: "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other; or he will hold to the one and despise the other; you cannot serve God and mammon." It is perfectly proper to be rich, but let not your riches be your god. Ever apposite will be the prayer we read in Holy Writ: "Give me neither beggary nor riches: give me only the necessities of life: lest perhaps being filled I should be tempted to deny and say: Who is the Lord? or being compelled to poverty I should steal and forswear the Name of my God."

"Give not that which is holy to the dogs." These words of our Lord need also to be explained. Among the Jews the dog had an evil repute. This may be a surprise to us who look upon him as

> "The joy, the solace and the aid of man,
> The rich man's guardian and the poor man's friend,
> The only creature faithful to the end."

But to the Jews he was "an unclean animal" and had to live on offal and carrion. His very name was a term of reproach. "Begone, you dogs," exclaims St. John in the Apocalypse to those who stand not for the Lamb.

And still in the parable of the rich man the dog

plays a beautiful part. When no human being has pity on Lazarus, who is lying at the gate, a mass of ulcers, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fall from the rich man's table, the dogs come and lick his sores.

And what of the meeting between Jesus and the woman of Syro-Phenicia? "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously troubled by a devil." Such was her prayer. But to try her faith, or to draw it out, our Lord answered not a word. And "His Disciples came and besought Him, saying: 'Send her away for she cries after us.' And He answering, said: 'I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' And entering into a house, He would have no one know it: but He could not be hid. She came and adored Him, saying: 'Lord, help me.' Who replied: 'Let the children first be satisfied; for it is not good to take the bread of the children, and cast it to the dogs.' But she answered and said to Him: 'Yea, Lord, but even the whelps eat under the table of the crumbs of the children, that fall from the table of their masters.' Then Jesus answering said to her: 'O woman, great is thy faith; be it done to thee as thou wilt. For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter.' And when she was come to her house, she found the girl lying upon the bed and the devil was gone out. And her daughter was cured from that hour."

The Twelve had learned thereby that even heathen "dogs" were not to be sent away unheard. But to us there is in this history even more than the solemn interest of Christ's compassion and mighty Messianic working, or the lessons of His teaching. We view it in its deeper bearing upon, and lessons to all times. To how many, not only of all nations and conditions, but in all states of heart and mind, nay, in the very lowest depths of conscious guilt and alienation from God, must this have brought unspeakable comfort, the comfort of truth and the comfort of His teaching. Be it so, an outcast, "dog"; not at the table; but under the table. Still we are at His feet; it is our Master's Table; He is our Master; and as He breaks the children's bread, it is of necessity that "the children's crumbs" fall to us — enough, quite enough, and to spare. Never can we be outside His reach, nor of that of His gracious care, and of sufficient provision to eternal life.

But to return to our text. "Give not that which is holy to the dogs; neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet and turn to gore you."

Here Jesus meant that the truth of faith must not be indiscriminately offered to men utterly ungodly and hardened who wilfully would reject it with blasphemy and mockery. As said the old Hebrew adage, "Give not wisdom to him who knows not its value, for it is more precious than pearls,

and he who seeks it not, is worse than a swine that defiles and rolls himself in the mud; so he who knows not the value of wisdom, profanes its glory." Charitable we must be but prudent also, for we must not put it in their power to dishonor the grace of God. Jesus meant also that carefully from those corrupt miscreants must be warded off the souls of our children — those living pearls bought by Him with a great price — lest they get stained at their impure contact and be dragged along the filthy road that leads to perdition.

Later on we shall meet the prodigal son, the deserter of the farm, reduced to feed swine, who would fain fill his belly with the husks the swine do eat; and no man gives unto him.

But let us come immediately to that unforgettable scene where the devil begs from Jesus to be sent into a swine.

Here is St. Matthew's account of it: "Having reached the country of the Gerasens, Jesus was met by two demoniacs who ran out of the tombs; they were so violent that nobody could pass along the road there. They shrieked, 'Son of God, what have we to do with Thee? Art Thou come hither to torment us before the time?' Now, some distance away, there was a large drove of swine grazing; so the demons begged Him, saying, 'If Thou art to cast us out, send us into that drove of swine." He said to them: 'Begone!' So out they came and

went to the swine, and the entire drove rushed down the steep slope into the sea and perished in the water. The herdsmen fled; they went off to the town and reported the whole affair of the demoniacs. Then all the town came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw Him they begged Him that He would depart from their district."

May this repulsive symbol of moral ugliness and of vile appetites warn us never to harbor Satan in our hearts! He who took shelter in these animals and caused their death, soils all that he touches and always brings despair and malediction in his wake. And may God guard us from ever uttering the woeful request of the Gerasens to Jesus. They did not ask Him to depart from their district out of a feeling of their own unworthiness, as Peter asked Him; but they feared greater losses of their temporal goods, and did not appreciate the benefit Jesus had bestowed on him from whom He had expelled the demon. Unlike them let us ever say with the two Disciples on Easter morning: Stay with us, O Master, for the day has now declined, and the night of our life is coming. Stay with us, O Master.

Let us mention the eagles who, "wheresoever the body shall be, thither will they also be gathered together." According to some commentators, this means that wheresoever corrupted humanity shall live, there shall the angels of heaven be employed

in separating the just from the sinners. Others tell us that wheresoever the glorious body of the Son of Man shall appear, at His second coming, there shall the eagles — that is, the just souls — gather around Him and cling unto His standard. Others explain that wheresoever the body of the Son of Man shall be under the Eucharistic species, there shall the eagles, the holy souls of the Church, gather, to nourish themselves by it.

Let us also recall the words that encourage us to confidence in prayer: "What man is there among you, of whom if his son ask for bread, will he reach him a stone? Or ask for a fish, will he reach him a serpent for a fish? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he reach him a scorpion? If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask Him?"

We will not bring this chapter to a close without reminding ourselves of what, speaking after the manner of men, we owe to our cattle and all our live stock. What a lesson of endeavor and activity, kindness, zeal, loyalty, vigilance and faithfulness we receive from them if only we have ears to hear. How serviceable they are and how uncomplaining! Sheep do not refuse to give us their wool, nor cows their milk. Dogs lick the hand that has hurt

them. Even wild animals teach us to be prudent and drill us to patience. And does not the ox, who knoweth his owner's voice and footstep condemn us who refuse to hear God speaking to us?

No doubt, ridiculous exaggeration must be avoided, and distasteful, to say the least, it is to see city women and men centering their affection on a pug dog, a cat or a parrot; we country people do not need to hold membership in the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; but neither should we abuse our old servants or mistreat our old friends.

"We have abused, alas, too often," says Farrar, "to purposes of cruelty and tyranny, the empire which God granted us over the brutes. It is sad that man has thus made even the most beautiful and innocent part of the animal creation shun, and hate, and fear him. It is not naturally so. In the wilderness Jesus was with the wild beasts, and they harmed Him not. The timid things of the wilderness learned to trust the ancient hermits. In the desert islands the denizens of the forest and the fell shrink not from man until he has shown them his deadliness and treachery. The birds, it is said, and I can well believe it, fluttered without fear about St. Francis of Assisi." For Jesus' sake we have a plain duty to the dumb animals, to be considerate to them, to be gentle with them, to discourage and to abhor all needless cruelty towards them, to teach our

boys and our ignorant men to be kind to them, to determine never

> "To mix our pleasure or our pride with
> Sorrow of the meanest thing that feels."

"Be kind to dumb creatures, nor grudge them your care,
God gave them their life and your love they must share;
And He who the sparrow's fall tenderly heeds
Will lovingly look on compassionate deeds.

"The brave are the tender — then do not refuse
To carefully cherish the brutes you must use;
Make their life's labor sweet, not dreary and sad,
Their working and serving you, easy and glad.

"He made them and blessed them, the least are His care:
The swallow that wings her swift flight through the air,
The dog on your hearthstone, the horse in your barn,
The cow in your pasture, the sheep on your farm."

CHAPTER XII

A DESERTER

"He left his village and his kin,
The holy mound, his mother's grave;
Across the mountains and the wave
He chose the pagan and his sin.

"He left the willow and the oak,
The silent woods of boyhood's balm;
Beneath the bamboos and the palm
He chose the jungle and the yoke."

But let us set poetry aside, for the immortal prose of the Gospel alone can pen-picture the subject at hand wherein Christ seems to have summed up all His words of light, life and love:

"A man had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the property that falls to me.' And he divided the estate among them. A few days later the younger son got together all he had and went away into a distant land, where he squandered his means in loose living. After he had spent his all, a severe famine set in throughout that land, and he began to

be in actual want; so he went and engaged himself to a citizen of that land, who sent him to his fields to feed swine. And he was fain to satisfy his hunger with the pods the swine were eating; no one gave him anything. But when he came to his senses he said, "How many hired men of my father have more than enough to eat, and here am I perishing of hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I do not deserve to be called your son any more; only make me like one of your hired men.' " So he got up and went off to his father. But when he was still far away his father saw him and felt pity for him and ran to fall upon his neck and kiss him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I do not deserve to be called your son any more.'

"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick, bring the best robe and put it on him, give him a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet, and bring the fatted calf, kill it, and let us eat and be merry, for this son of mine was dead, and is come to life; he was lost and he is found.'

"So they began to make merry. Now his elder son was out in the field, and as he came near the house, he heard the music and dancing; so summoning one of the servants, he asked what this meant. The servant told him, 'Your brother has arrived, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he

has got him back safe and sound.' This angered him, and he would not go in. His father came out and tried to appease him, but he replied, 'Look at all the years I have been serving you! I have never neglected any of your orders, and yet you have never given me so much as a kid, to let me make merry with my friends: but as soon as this son of yours arrives, after having wasted your means with harlots, you kill the fatted calf for him!' The father said to him, 'My son, you and I are always together, and all I have is yours. We could not but make merry and rejoice, for your brother here was dead and has come to life again. He was lost but he has been found.' "

Piteous and heart-rending is the story of this poor country lad — the prodigal son. " 'Tis true 'tis pity and pity 'tis 'tis true," his parting from the old homestead with his dream of dreams; the follies to which he gives way; the sorrows that stab him; his manly resolution when all seems lost; and his return homewards. All these details could be made to mark the sinful soul's various steps when flying away from God, finding in sin only wormwood and ashes, and at last coming back into the arms of her Father — assuming that He gives her time and grace to do so. No doubt it were profitable for us to develop this simile and expose the eloquent lessons of this parable, but this is not in our program. Our

task is different. For in reading the story of the son who went away, the thought has come to us of that tragic drama unknown to our fathers but so sadly carried out in these our days: we mean, our lads' desertion of the farm, our lads' abandonment of their mother — our unfortunate sons who forsake the home where they were born, the fruitful fields where dwell joy and plenty, and rush into the murderous cities which, vampire-like, suck their blood and sap their life. And I want to write words of warning against such an exodus from the holy earth.

When was it that this young boy felt in his brain, or in his heart, the germ of that morbid idea that the country was not good enough for him? To some the guilty tempter is the school, the school which is not sufficiently rural, which teaches one how to become a salesman in a store or a slave in a shop, but has nothing to say of the soul of the soil which we love. To others the seducer is the Army or the Navy. I know how necessary to America — and to the whole world — our soldiers and our sailors are— God bless them! — but I also know that once gone to the barracks or to the sea, our boys are usually lost to agriculture. As a rule city boys only should be invited to enlist, for the country boys are here already performing a solemn and urgent patriotic duty. Again, to others the prompter comes under

the shape of a distant far-away relative who by his glowing and mendacious accounts of sky-high wages for his eight-hour work sometimes succeeds in snatching and ruining the young tiller of the soil.

Whatever be the cause and whoever the agent, once their decision is taken to break away from the village, our sons still hesitate before tearing asunder so many ties that bind them to the home, and before setting aside those many sympathies more soft than silk, more strong than steel, more precious than gold that hang around the hearthstone. Heart-breaking is the travail of their soul, their soul

> "Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
> The other powerless to be born."

But at last they speak. And no one can understand them. No one can believe that such a thing can be true.

But the parents soon notice that they are facing an unbreakable will. Besides the known motives admitted by the boy, they have a suspicion that there are unknown and untold others lurking in his breast. And pitifully they look around for advice and for help.

They go to the pastor and to the mayor and to the neighbors. But it is too late. Once the song of the Siren of the city has bewitched the heart of a boy, only a miracle from God could disenthrall

it from the spell. And the parents at last yield to the boy's request. They give him money and reluctantly let him go. Oh! the money that the mother saved in selling those tomatoes and those pickles last fall — the pin money saved for emergency purposes — goes to him, too. She hides it in the little trunk between two flannel shirts and a woolen sweater she has knitted herself — and says nothing of it. The only words she can cry out, are: "My boy, my boy," when she sees her young bird on the edge of the nest trying his wings to fly into the world.

He goes away. And the village has lost two good, sinewy arms, and the city once more has gained a prodigal son.

And that night at supper there is a gap at the table and the mother puts up her apron and weeps: "God, bless him," she whispers, "and bring him to us safely back again."

What usually happens to the boy who has answered the call of the city? At first the things he sees are fair to the eyes and delightful to behold. "The salary is fine and the grub is good," he writes in his first letter. When a man is young and is thought to have some money, there is not much difficulty in getting on and making acquaintances; he is pretty sure to be in demand, and, with a silver key in his hand, there is not a door but will readily open before him while his money lasts. What a

tingling, novel sensation for this lad in his teens to find himself in surroundings where, instead of being thwarted and blamed, he is flattered and praised and looked upon as a "good fellow"; in place of being pulled back, he is pushed on, being told that he is all right, and not — what he has so often heard — all wrong. "There are always to be found," says Father Vaughan, "those who teach that it cannot be wrong to do what you like, provided you can pay for it."

But soon he comes to himself; the fumes of the city are not fit for him. Little by little his lungs, made for the labor and life of the fields, do not act with the same regularity now that they do not find in the poisoned atmosphere of the factory the pure air which gives freshness and vitality to the blood. Slowly but surely tuberculosis sets in.

Come the days of sickness. The co-boarders are now very indifferent indeed about that young fellow who sleeps next room,[1] and who spits blood, and whose disease perhaps is catching.

[1]At this writing one of my farmers supplies me with the following pen-picture of one of those furnished rooms in the city:

"A dimly lighted hallway, and a stair
Leading to darker recesses above,
A furtive glance at those who come and go,
No hand held out in friendliness or love.

"One window in the room, facing a court,
A narrow bed, a cartoon on the wall,

(*Continued on p. 135*)

And he will then think of the devoted folk who are in the village. Over there never anyone is abandoned; even strangers are as well taken care of as the members of the family. "That's bread cast upon the waters: it will return to us," they say; and unstintedly they do their tasks of love.

But the white plague is not the only evil to which our prodigal son is a possible prey. To us Christians there are greater than this. Far away from known faces and friendly hearts one hesitates less, much less, to walk on the way that leads to sin and to hell. And as once one is started on that path, the slopes get fast and slippery, one goes down to the bottom almost without knowing it; "one drinketh iniquity like water," says the Book of God.

"For when lust,
By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk,
But most by lewd and lavish acts of sin,
Lets in defilement to the inward parts,
The soul grows clotted by contagion,
Imbodies and imbrutes, till she quite lose
The divine property of her first being."

One chair, a trunk, a dresser and a rug
And that is all.

"Yet there are those who have a little house,
Set on a hill, where gay birds often come.
While I — have this awaiting me each night;
God pity me that I must call it home."

Speak no more to them of the church where they received their first Communion; speak no more of the Cross of Christ. Faith is dead within them. "They are," as St. Jude says, "clouds without water which are carried about by winds; trees of the autumn, unfruitful, twice dead, plucked out by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own confusion; wandering stars, to whom the storm of darkness is reserved forever."

Meanwhile the elder brother, faithful to his post, surveys and strides along each acre of his lands. He depends on nobody but God. His labor, I do not deny it, is hard, but he loves it.

Hard, I said; yes, it is. Of course to city folk it is very picturesque to see a ploughman at work, for instance, on a soft early spring day. It is a beautiful contrast, that light brown of the turned-over earth, and the fresh green of the remainder of the field; and what more pleasing than these furrows so beautifully straight and regular? But go up and walk by the ploughman's side, you man from town, and see how you like it. You will find it hard and dirty work. In a few minutes you will find it difficult to drag along your feet, laden with some pounds' weight to each of adherent earth; and you will have formed some idea of the physical exertion, and the constant attention, which the ploughman needs, to keep his furrow straight and

even, to retain the plough at the right depth in the ground, and to manage his horses. Hard work for him; and ill-paid work. No horse, mule, donkey, camel, or other beast of labor in the world, goes through so much exertion, in proportion to his strength, between sunrise and sunset, as does that rational being, all to earn shelter and fare for him and his family, all to produce food for you, O man from town.

But hard as is his labor he finds it light because, as I said before, he *loves* it: quietly he goes to it, quietly he starts it, and at sundown he is happy because he has earned his share of the bread that feeds the world.

"Though round his breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on his head."

Nature is to him the great book ever wide open, with its peerless beauties and sublime mysteries. He knows its marvellous ever-acting energy, and he knows its requirements which he fulfills as best he can. In the midst of the fields, no unsanitary contact has he to fear, no tyrannical authority has he to endure, for he is his own master. Poor as he may be, fresh air and sunshine are his: there are no microbes nor stench in his shop; for he works under the canopy of heaven, under the lights of God, in the midst of good grass and flowers, in the company

of the birds, whose joyous symphonies are heard from everywhere. And when comes the night he soundly sleeps during the hours that God gave us to sleep, and wakes up brave and happy for the hours that God gave us to work.

It is true that his salary is not regular; but all things considered, it is better than the city man's weekly wages. Expenses in the country cannot be compared with those in town. No profiteer's rent to pay on the first of the month; no baker's bill, for the housewife makes bread herself — and how good it tastes! — out of the flour ground out from her own wheat; no bill at the meat-market either, for the poultry yard is well peopled and the larder is well stocked. The garden yields more vegetables than can be eaten, and I beg leave to tell you, O man from town, that these vegetables are ripe and fresh, like the fruits of the orchard which are so plentiful that even when the canning is done, some have to be sold.

When Sunday comes — the dear, delicious, silent Sunday — it is both the Lord's Day and the day of respite, rest, and recreation. Mr. Churchill has said it well: "Sunday on the farm is a day essentially different from other days — you can tell it without looking at the calendar. The sun knows it, and changes the quality of his light; the very animals, dogs and cats and horses, know it: and most of all the children know it." Sunday is the day when we

all go to church to pray to God, who guides, protects and blesses us.

To be religious is to be honest: one leads to the other. Faithful to the farm, the villager's soul knows of no hatred, no injustice, no envy, no jealousy: these words are not found in the farmer's vocabulary; for he believes in God and observes His commandments.

If the deserter sometimes thinks of all this, if, closing his eyes for a moment, he sees anew

". . . The orchard, the meadow, the deep-tangled wildwood,
And every loved spot which his infancy knew!
The wide-spreading pond, and the mill that stood by it,
The bridge, and the rock where the cataract fell,
The cot of his father, the dairy-house nigh it,
And even the rude bucket that hung in the well —
The old oaken bucket, the iron-bound bucket,
The moss-covered bucket which hung in the well. . . ."

(Smile if you like, my dear farmers, in reading this; I know that to him this would bring tears.) If he happens, when the sky is sad, to compare what he lost with what he found, less happy than the prodigal of the parable, he has not always, he has only seldom the courage — the backbone — to come back to the home of his childhood. How many of those poor wanderers, in spite of the ardent desires of their heart, in spite of the homesickness

that corrodes their being, never more shall see that home where they were so well loved, those blessed fields where they could have lived such a happy life.

"Am I mad that I should cherish that which bears but bitter fruit?
I will tear it from my bosom, though my heart be at the root."

Yes, perhaps at times they sigh something like this, and a little grain of conscience makes them sore. But it is too late. To break their fetters the mettle of energy were required; and gone is all energy within them. They like their tyrants, whose siren voices are so bewitching, and whose least call makes them thrill and throb to the core. And so, without even taking the trouble to try to resist, they lay themselves down at the foot of the tree of death. And all the world to them is bitter as a tear. And their heart chokes them till they hear it not. "Some dark night, it may be, they will puke up their sick existence by suicide," as Carlyle says graphically.

At all events, their death usually will be a death without friends, without a priest — without God. And forty-eight hours afterwards, of that beautiful sample of manhood, built like a rock, entitled to a century of country life, capable of all labors and worthy of all true joys, there remains a corpse buried in that immense cemetery where country people never

go because they would run the risk of getting lost, and because their dead sleep their last sleep in their own little acre of God, in the family lot, near the church at the foot of the Cross.

Christian women, who so often are greatly responsible for the desertion of so many of our lads, remember these words of an old bishop: "If the prodigal son had not been motherless, he would not have given up his home." Never cease to encourage your boys to stay with you; make home pleasant for them; use all your influence to keep them on the farm. Do not let them be disassociated from the holy earth. O mothers, when you gave them birth, yours was a semi-divine labor: yours is also a semi-divine power.

CHAPTER XIII

JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

"I was a stricken deer that left the herd
Long since. With many an arrow deep infixed
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
There was I, found by One who had Himself
Been hurt by the archers. In His Heart He bore,
And in His hands and feet, the cruel scars.
With gentle force soliciting the darts,
He drew them forth, and healed, and bade me live."

Who among us, at times, has not felt like giving vent to sentiments similar to those expressed in these lines? The purest human heart, when weighed in the scales of the sanctuary, is ever found wanting. "He who thinks to be without sin deceives himself and the truth is not in him." We all need to be shepherded under the guidance of a sweet and strong hand and heart.

And Jesus is the Good Shepherd of mankind.

"No earthly images can come up," says Cardinal Newman, "to the awful and gracious truth that God became the Son of Man — that the Word became

flesh and was born of a woman. This ineffable mystery surpasses human words. No titles of earth can Christ give to Himself, ever so lowly or mean, which will fitly show us His condescension. His act and deed is too great even for His own lips to utter it. Yet He delights in the image of the Good Shepherd, as conveying to us, in such degree as we can conceive it, some notion of the degradation, hardship and pain which He underwent for our sake."

Jesus, the Good Shepherd: This word for our Savior was uttered first by Jacob — himself once a shepherd — as he lay dying in his tent, and with the long thoughts of old age, went back to the scenery of his early life speaking of God as having "shepherded him all his years." Christ was prophesied under this figure by the prophet Isaias: "Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand and His arm shall rule for Him. He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom." And thus again, He announced by the mouth of Ezechiel: "Behold, I, even I, will both search My sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out His flock in the day that He is among His sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." And David addresses Him: "Hear, O Thou Shepherd of Israel, Thou that leadest Joseph like a sheep,

show Thyself also, Thou that sittest upon the cherubim." And in like manner, St. Peter speaks of our returning "to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls." All through the Holy Scriptures the golden thread runs until, in the closing pages of the Apocalypse, we read of "the Lamb who leads His flocks to the rivers of waters of life."

Now what is the task and what is the relationship of a shepherd to his sheep? He likes these dumb creatures of his care. In the early morning he leads them from their fold to the pasture lands and to the still waters, that they may eat and drink where none may frighten or harm them. He heals them when they are sick. Should one of them go astray, he searches for it, tracking it by the tufts of wool left in the briars and thorns. Should danger assail, he must be ready to risk and give his life for his sheep. And such has been, and such is the life-work of Jesus for us.

I

Jesus loves us; and with what love! "Conceive," says Father Faber, "all the love of Peter, Paul and John, of Joseph and of Magdalen, of all the apostles and martyrs, the confessors and virgins of the Church in all ages, thrown into one heart made, by miracle, strong enough to hold such love; then add to it all the burning love which the nine choirs of multitu-

dinous angels have for God and crown it with the amazing love of the Immaculate Heart of our dear Mother; and still it comes not near to, nay, it is but a poor imitation of, the love which Jesus has for each one of us, however lowly and unworthy and sinful we may be!" Jesus loves us beyond the wildest dreams of imagination. He said Himself that He loves us with the very same love wherewith He is loved by His Father: an infinite, an immortal love. He loves us with an everlasting love; therefore has He drawn us, taking pity on us. He has loved us before we began to be. He has loved us in those darksome hours, when, through sin, we were His enemies. He has loved us gratuitously; for what have we done to deserve His love, and such love? What have we done but hurt His Heart by our indifference towards Him? Is it because He sees our weakness and the danger of the many seductions which beset us? Is it because His own love impels Him to anticipate the times marked by His wisdom? I know not, but verily it seems that He cannot restrain the overflowing of His Heart, and from the vast ocean of life, of which eternity is the natural shore, great waves pass beyond their bounds and flow down to us in streams. Yes, even in this world, where everything wavers, where at every step we may fall into an abyss, amidst our darkness, struggles and sins, Jesus gives us the first fruits of His eternal happiness: He loves us and saves us, as far as our

liberty allows Him to do so, and in truth sows the seed of heaven in our hearts.

If there were no irreverence in doing so, we would put these lines of a poet on the lips of the Divine Shepherd, for they may give us a faint idea of His love strong as death:

"Come, rest in this Bosom, my own stricken deer,
Tho' the herd have fled from thee, thy home is still here;
Here still is the smile, that no cloud can o'ercast,
And a Heart and a Hand all thy own to the last.
I know not, I ask not if guilt is in that heart;
I but know that I love thee, whatever thou art."

But, better, gentle reader, listen to His own divine words, for the most burning language of human poetry remains too cold when it strives to tell us of "the breadth, and the length, and the height, and the depth of the surpassing charity of Christ." "My child, give Me thy heart." "What is there that I ought to have done for thee that I have not done?" "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet still will not I forget thee." "I will have mercy on thee more than a mother." "Even to your old age I am the same, and to your gray hairs I will carry you. I have made you, and I will bear,

I will save you." "Your whole head is sick and your whole heart is sad. Yet wash yourselves; take away the evil of your devices from My eyes. Learn to do well; if your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow; and if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool."

But true love is never contented with words. It longs to prove itself by deeds. The Good Shepherd's love manifests itself every day to His sheep in manifold ways. It would be useless to try to enumerate a tithe of them here.

II

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, feeds His sheep. He is the bread of life: whosoever eats His flesh has life in him. Jesus looked over the universe and He found nothing worthy of our souls; then He constituted Himself our food. This wondrous deed of goodness and love we shall understand only in heaven. In the meantime this divine food we must receive often, for it is the food of those who are well; not the remedy of those who are ill. "It is not offered to a select portion of the flock," says Tesnière, "but to all who have need of His flesh, in order to live of His life and to secure to themselves its eternal possession. Now, all men belong to this necessitous class. Jesus presents Himself not as a rare aliment to make a holiday feast more

sumptuous, but as the daily bread necessary for the support of ordinary life, and which must in consequence be eaten every day. This distribution of the Bread of life is as large, abundant and infinite as His love for man. It is the measure of His Heart. The desire of His Heart is to supply the daily needs of all men: needs of restoration, needs of conservation, needs of action, needs of spiritual fecundity and constant progress even to the perfection and plenitude of eternal life." To free her from her daily faults the soul needs the daily antidote of the Eucharist. Holy Communion being the individual appropriation of the whole work of Christ, he who communicates receives personally the redemption of the whole world. St. Paul says that "he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Body of the Lord." But then, he who receives Holy Communion worthily eats and drinks acquittal and salvation. "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, abideth in Me and I in him," says our Lord; both are thereby united, not only in one spirit but in one flesh and one body, the Body of Christ. Speaking of the newly made Christians, St. Leo teaches that "they are no more the same after their baptism: the flesh of those baptized becomes the flesh of the Crucified." What then shall we say of those coming from the altar-rails, since the sacramental communion is the earthly consummation of

the union started at baptism? If the divine Grace and the Sacraments unite us to Jesus in such wise that truly we may draw near God in the self-same manner as Jesus Himself, what can God refuse us? It is not only sympathy with Jesus that causes God to welcome us: it is the respect He owes His eternal Son: it is the infinite love He harbors for Him; aye, it is the very necessity of His nature and the invincible energy of His divine Fatherhood. "No love less than infinite love," says Bishop Vaughan, "could have devised or contrived half so beauteous or half so sumptuous a banquet for the weary pilgrim, winding his way along the dusty road of life to the great city of God. Further than this we cannot go — at least not in this life. There is nothing between this and the Beatific Vision itself. In the adorable Eucharist we have all that we shall ever have in heaven. The differences are only accidental. When the consecrated particle rests upon our tongues, we hold within us all that constitutes the essential bliss of the saints in eternal glory; the difference is merely that we fail to realize it. We possess it, but without being able to estimate what we possess. If, by some stupendous miracle, our eyes were suddenly opened, we should find that we were really in heaven; or rather that heaven itself had come down upon us, and entered into our souls." It is thus that the Good Shepherd feeds His sheep.

III

Jesus the Good Shepherd goeth after the sheep which is lost, until He findeth it. And when He hath found it, He layeth it on His shoulder, rejoicing. When a soul has gone astray from Him, He follows her with His grace and His light. He calls her through those thousand and one events framed by His fatherly Providence, and leaves her only when He has exhausted all possible efforts to lead her back to the fold. He alone, who bowed Himself and came down, He alone can do this: He alone can bear the whole world's weight, the load of a sinful world, the burden of man's guilt, the accumulated debt, past, present, and to come; the suffering which we owed but could not pay, the wrath of God on the children of Adam. No doubt, sin injures the heart of Christ inasmuch as it offends Him, but it does not modify Him. It modifies His acts, but not His essence; it does not change His love which is His natural disposition towards us. As before nothingness His goodness becomes love, so in face of sin this love melts into mercy on the sole condition that the sinful sheep shall hope in the Shepherd, the Good Shepherd of mankind. And in certain respects, no one has such reason to hope in God as a sinner has. True, divine Sanctity has such a horror of sin that it obliges divine Justice to punish it with the most frightful penalties, but this is precisely the

reason why divine Mercy is incomparably more moved by sin than by all the other misfortunes that can befall us. For, if we regard it on the side of the punishment it deserves, sin is the loss of God; it is then the greatest evil and truly the absolute misery. But shall not the greatest misery draw the greatest compassion? Such is the reason why divine Mercy, in this matter, more than in any other, stirs itself, as it were, that the sinner be led to repentance, and trusting and hoping in God may obtain pardon and be saved.

Someone whose name is unknown has prettily rendered this aspect of Jesus the Searcher of souls. The edge of the words of the Gospel has been so blurred by use that it may perhaps help some of us to realize it more vividly if we hear from them now in this poetical form:

"There were ninety and nine that safely lay
In the shelter of the fold,
But one was out on the hills away,
Far off from the gates of gold;
Away on the mountains wild and bare,
Away from the tender Shepherd's care.

" 'Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine;
Are they not enough for Thee?'
But the Shepherd made answer: 'This of Mine
Has wandered away from Me;

And although the road be rough and steep,
I go to the desert to find My sheep.'

"But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through
Ere He found His sheep that was lost.
Out in the desert He heard its cry —
Sick and helpless and ready to die.

" 'Lord, whence are those blood-drops all the way
That mark out the mountain's track?'
'They were shed for one who had gone astray
Ere the Shepherd could bring him back.'
'Lord, whence are Thy hands so rent and torn?'
'They are pierced to-night by many a thorn.'

"And all through the mountains, thunder-riven,
And up from the rocky steep
There rose a cry to the gate of heaven,
'Rejoice! I have found My sheep!'
And the angels echoed around the throne —
'Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own.' "

Gentle reader, I tell thee: be never discouraged by thy past, but know that, whatever it has been, the best may still be thine.

IV

Jesus the Good Shepherd giveth His life for His sheep. But he that is a hireling and whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming and leaveth the sheep and fleeth, and the wolf catcheth them and scattereth the sheep. "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

But what shall we say of the Shepherd laying down His life for His sheep? Our English tongue has golden words, but no words can convey the fathomless mystery of such divine condescension. Even the Prophet stammers and reels when dealing with this abysmal love: "And he says: 'Ah, ah, ah, Lord God: behold, I cannot speak.'" Paul alone perhaps conveys the complete truth when, set face to face with this proof of boundless love, he dares call it "the folly of the Cross"; a love so profound and so prodigal, so strenuous and so extravagant that it goes beyond all possible limits: not against, but above the powers of human reason.

And didst thou notice? "The Good Shepherd giveth." There is neither past nor future in His gift: it is the Eternal Present. Yea, it is every day Good Friday; Christ renews His death at every moment of the day on the altar! The Mass is that substantial, universal, incessant irradiation of the sacrifice offered by Jesus on Calvary; it is that ever-living trophy of the Lamb slain for the world; it

gives us anew the Divine Lover, dead for us; it continues not only His sacred death, but His whole life, His life divine and human; it continues it for God whom it glorifies and gladdens; it continues it for us to whom it gives the very substance of Redemption.

St. Teresa, oppressed by the weight of God's grace, asked Him one day to tell her how she could pay Him her debt of gratitude. The Holy Ghost told her to hear one Mass, after which her debt would be paid. Ah! were all hell to engulf you as a volcano of despair; were Satan to whisper in your ear as he did into that of Judas, a thousand reasons for trusting your Shepherd no more, just attend one Mass; think of what one Mass is: the light of love that shall stream forth from the Divine Host will destroy those dark clouds, and silencing the enemy of God, bring back into your heart that holy light which gives peace in giving faith and hope. Alas! why do we not make the most of every Mass we hear, why do we hear Mass in such a languid, irresponsible fashion, the Mass in which "the Good Shepherd giveth His life for His sheep"!

V

We say every day that "we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture," we say that "we have erred and strayed from His ways, like lost sheep."

Let us never forget these truths; let us never forget that, on the one hand, we are sinners, but that, on the other hand, Christ is our Guide, our Guardian, our Shepherd. Let us beware of not following when He goes before: "He calleth His own sheep by name and leadeth them out and goeth before, and His sheep follow Him, for they know His voice." As on His resurrection, while Mary Magdalen wept, He called her by name; so, too, He calls us by our name. Let us answer to His call. Let us love Him who has first loved us." "Let us endeavor," as says St. Teresa, "not to wander far from our dear Shepherd; for the sheep that keep near the Shepherd are always the most caressed, the best fed, and they often receive some chosen dainty from the Shepherd's own repast."

Blessed are they who give the flower of their years, and the vigor of soul and body to Him; blessed are they who in their youth go to Him who gave His life for them. Blessed are they who decide — come happiness, come sorrow, come sunshine, come storm — that He shall be their Lord and Master, their King and Shepherd.

Even if sinful days should come, let us remember that Jesus the Good Shepherd is "our advocate with the Father, and He is the propitiation for our sins." Let us remember that there is never a situation so strained as to preclude the possibility of pardon. Let us remember that if Judas is lost, it is not for

having sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, but for having despaired of the Good Shepherd's divine mercy. This Good Shepherd is such an inexhaustible fountain of mercy and goodness, that the most faithful mother could not snatch from the flames her own beloved child so eagerly as He helps a man of contrite heart; even were it possible that he had committed every day, and a thousand times over, the sins of the world.

" 'Him can no fount of fresh forgiveness lave,
Whose sins, once washed by the baptismal wave.' "
So spoke the fierce Tertullian. But she sighed,
The Infant Church! of love she felt the tide
Stream on her from her Lord's yet recent grave
And then she smiled: and in the Catacombs,
With eye suffused but heart inspired true,
On those walls subterranean, where she hid
Her head, 'mid ignominy, death, and tombs,
She her Good Shepherd's hasty image drew."

Love has no diviner emblem than the Good Shepherd. It seems that it was by an inspiration both of holiness and genius that Venerable Mother Euphrasia Pelletier of Angers chose Him as the patron and the model of her redeeming Order. It has been said that Mary Magdalen, the repentant, sinful Mary, reigns now in heaven next to the sinless Mary, the Mother of Jesus. But who will say how many Magdalens are marching heavenwards, thanks to

the Sisters of this most noble Order of charity? A servant in their house a few years ago, it was my good fortune to attend the angelic death of one of their "children." Before returning to God, with the sad smile of those whom we are to see nevermore, she gave me the following lines, which will close appropriately this little study in honor of Jesus the Good Shepherd:

"Into a desolate land,
White with the drifted snow,
Into a weary land
Our truant-footsteps go:
Yet doth Thy care, O Father,
Ever Thy wanderers keep;
Still doth Thy love, O Shepherd,
Follow Thy sheep.

"Over the pathless wild
Do I not see Him come —
Him who shall bear me back,
Him who shall lead me home?
Listen! between the storm-gusts
Unto the straining ear,
Comes not the cheering whisper —
'Jesus is near'?

"Over me He is bending!
Now I can safely rest,

Found at last and clinging
Close to the Shepherd's breast:
So let me lie till the fold-bells
Sound on the homeward track,
And the rejoicing angels
Welcome us back."

O Shepherd Eternal, allow us to lie near Thee. We are finite; but Thine infinitely. We are groping in the dark like sheep that have gone astray: but Thou art the Way. We are bewildered by many winds of error: but Thou art the Truth. We are weak, wan and weary: but Thou art the Life. Jesus our Good Shepherd, help the sheep of Thy fold that at least we may be "found at the last." Thou hast said that Thy sheep hear Thy Voice; and Thou knowest them, and they follow Thee. But other sheep Thou hast that are not of this fold; them also Thou must bring, and they shall hear Thy Voice. O Shepherd Immortal, let them hear the whisperings of Thy still, small Voice which it is so easy to hear near Thy Tabernacle. May Thy Kingdom come.

"Great Shepherd of our souls! O, guide
Thy wandering flock to feed
In the pastures green, and by the side
Of stilly waters lead.
Do Thou our erring footsteps keep,
Whose life was given for the sheep.

"O, let not us, who fain would cleave
To Thy communion, stray,
Nor, tempted into ruin, leave
The straight and narrow way:
Before us Thou the path hast trod,
And Thou canst lead us, Son of God.

"O, let us hear Thy warning voice,
And see Thy arm divine;
Thou know'st the people of Thy choice,
And Thou art known of Thine.
Do Thou our erring footsteps keep,
Whose life was given for the sheep.

"Then when we pass the vale of death,
Though more and more its shade
Around our journey darkeneth,
We will not be afraid,
If Thou art with us and Thy rod
And staff console us, Son of God."

It is enlightened by the Light that arises from the most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar that the souls that are astray will find the way to the fold.

The dogma of the Holy Eucharist is not only the most beautiful and consoling dogma: it is the central doctrine of our religion and the very focus of Divine Light and Love. It is the Sun in which

Jesus has set His Tabernacle. And the Tabernacle is nothing else but the tent pitched on earth till the last evening of time by Jesus the Good Shepherd of mankind.

CHAPTER XIV

OUR LORD WITH HIS HARVESTERS

One single word seems to sum up all the dealings of our Lord with His Disciples — a word which has now become well nigh commonplace, because, thanks be to Him, we have used it so often, but a word most majestic and sublime in its origin, since it recalls to our mind the very Being of God. Goodness is the word, effusive, patient, forgiving, self-sacrificing goodness.

The manifestation of this goodness we first notice when He calls them to Him. On the banks of the Jordan, after the testimony of St. John the Baptist, two fishermen of Galilee, John and Andrew, draw near to Him. "What seek you?" He asks them. It was more than the two young men could answer. Yet their reply shows that they are in earnest: "Rabbi, where dwellest Thou?" "Come and see," He says to them. They go and stay with Him.

The day after, Andrew tells his brother Simon: "We have found the Messiah!" And his brother comes to Jesus and surrenders to Him.

A fourth one, Philip, is found along the road. "Follow Me," Jesus says, and he follows Him.

A little farther on, He sees Nathanael reading under a fig tree. And He culls him as a flower.

He arrives at Capharnaum and sees a man sitting in the custom-house, and He calls him. And so of the others.

Needless to say that these apparently casual calls are the outcome of an infinite wisdom and an almighty will. All events are disposed, adapted, forethought, and forecast by God, but specially is this true of the events bearing upon the work of Redemption.

To mark this truth in His own way, Jesus, the first time He meets some of His Disciples, gives them new names characteristic of their mission. And such a reading into the far-away vistas of their future already empurples these seemingly simple calls with a tinge of eternity.

The call of the Apostles is undoubtedly one of the turning-points in the history of the universe, but if we look on them after the manner of men, how pitifully insignificant they are, these Apostles! Mostly all are fishermen, and one of them is a publican. But it matters not: dead are their yesterdays, they are the men of an ever-living future.

The future! How did the future appear to them? What an image could they form of it? Very cloudy no doubt it was, and very slowly did they enter into their career of being the co-founders

of the Church and co-workers with the God-Man. They were not aware of what they were to be, but this they knew, that they had "to bear fruits." It was our Lord's favored expression with them. And there is no nobler task than to be fruitbearing branches on the Divine Tree.

If the Creator, says St. Thomas, had given us only our being, He would have reserved for Him the better part of life. But He gave to His creatures not only the gift of existence, He gave them also the power of communicating their existence; and this is why, fruitfulness, in any sense, ever involves something of Sacredness and Divineness. Wherefore are they profoundly guilty who profane that gift; who dare use the orchards and nurseries of God merely for selfish and shameful commerce, and contrive to control the very work of God. Wherefore those must be branded as cowards who could be of service through their brain or through their brawn, be useful to their brethren and yield an uplifting influence over their family, their state and their nation, but abstain from fulfilling their task in the midst of sinful idleness. For, as Shakespeare says:

"Thyself and thy belongings
Are not thine own so proper as to waste
Thyself upon thy virtues, they on thee.
Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues

Did not go forth of us 'twere all alike
As if we had them not."

Those, therefore, whom God calls, like His Disciples, to spiritual fruitfulness and to the communication and development of divine gifts, never enough shall they wield their energy to make themselves worthy of their vocation.

This truth Jesus did not fail to instill into them. "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." It was as though He said: "Believe not that in coming to Me you have conferred a benefit on Me; you have but received what I have given. I have chosen you, and you are the greater because of your having been chosen. Election is simply the way in which I use My chosen ones to bless the world — the divine process by which the good seed is sown and scattered far and wide, and the heavenly harvest multiplied a thousandfold."

The call to the Disciples was then His first proof of goodness to them, and this goodness, not indeed preceded or deserved by any merit on their part, was nevertheless followed by all the consequences which it involves; and ahead of them all is fellowship.

At first glance there is something strange and wellnigh shocking in the Master's fellowship with His Disciples.

Jesus Christ is the Man for all men: it seems that

He can belong to no particular group, and should stay by Himself to lord it over the work to be done. And then Jesus Christ is God: as such, fellowship with men seems impossible and absurd. For fellowship means equality; it is the blending of lives; it is the brotherhood of hearts in an assented closeness; it is the mutual levelling of souls; it involves communion of thoughts, desires, and anxieties; it is love with its manifold freedom. But, then, what manner of intimacy can there be between Jesus Christ and men? Men are so feeble, so empty of heart and of hands; He is so transcendent, so beyond the limits of the world and of life.

Is it not the destiny of great men to live alone and to allow none on earth to invade the home of the soul whose name is intimacy? Friendless were Michelangelo, Shakespeare, Beethoven and Dante; friendless were Isaias and Moses. They had confidants; they had satellites of their glory; they had servants; standing alone in an immense isolation, they had no intimate friends: their soul was too high; their atmosphere no other man could share. They were as though marked with a sign of dread. Theirs was the song of the poet:

> "Yes, in the sea of life enisled,
> With echoing straits between us thrown,
> Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
> We mortal millions live alone."

How greater than they, the Divine Master! No soul here can enter the lists with Him; no thought can ever even from afar rival or imitate His thought. Whoso would flatter Himself to be even His inferior thereby would give proofs of insane pride. For inferiority implies a comparison, and no comparison is possible with Him. He is infinite, He is immense, He is God. None can stand near Him; none can enter into His Heart.

All this is true, but there is in Him something besides greatness. There is in Him a divine condescension which makes Him just one unit in the census of mankind, a condescension which lowers Him to our size, a condescension which leaves Him great, and greatest, and infinitely great, but raises us up to Him. This is Jesus as we see Him in the Gospels.

Tradition claims that He tempered the brightness of His eyes whose power was not adapted to the commerce of our daily life. I know not, but it is sure that He tempered the brightness of His soul, and knew, when such was His will, how to be a Friend, the Friend of men, the Friend that remains when all others leave us.

Thus was He with His Disciples. He set Himself to their level; He offered to them Himself as a centre for sympathy, intimate communication, familiar conversation, confidence and even playsome

but discreet flashes of humor, traces of which appear in the Holy Scriptures.

When the Divine Master is about to multiply the barley loaves, He sees Philip near Him, and knowing his artlessness, He says, no doubt with gentle merriment: "Philip, where are we to buy bread for all these people to eat?" This He said to test him, as St. John remarks. But Philip fails to grasp it: "Seven pounds' worth of bread would not be enough for them, for everybody to get even a morsel." This trait shows that amenity that reigned in the dealings of Jesus and His Disciples.

And mark the delicate tinge of it. It is not laughter: laughter is heavy, semi-material; therein enters usually a touch of pride and of ill-will. "It has a scornful tickling"; at best it indicates a lack of self-possession, since it is as a rule beyond the control of the will; no, we see no laughter, but we see a smile, a kind, noble, spiritual smile, such as is to be found in a superior nature as that of the Master.[1]

In His everyday intercourse with His own, the

[1]G. K. Chesterton, in *Orthodoxy,* p. 299, tells us that "There was some one thing that was too great for God to show us when He walked our earth; and I have sometimes fancied that it was His mirth." But those who have gone into the heart of the Gospels and found out that joy is essentially Christian, will see that we have nothing to detract from what we wrote.

tone of Jesus is gravely sweet and simple. He calls them His friends, His little children, His flock; He explains to them in private what He has taught the multitude: "To you it is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God; but to them that are without, all things are done in parables." He takes them apart to chat with them. Along the roads, from village to village He teaches and comforts them. He takes a motherly care of them, invites them to rest when the journey has been long, and blesses their sleep while He Himself retires to pray to His Father.

Or again, at the noon hour, when the Oriental heat is extreme — the sun blinding and scorching man and beast — He takes them aside under some palm tree or in one of those numberless grottos of Galilee, and there, in the midst of them, He speaks, "as no man ever spoke." And the flitting time spends itself sweet and fruitful in the preparation for the stern labors, and the Disciples are wooed and won by that love the measure of which is to be measureless: "As the Father hath loved Me, I also have loved you. Abide in My love," He says: "He that heareth you, heareth Me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me, despiseth Him that sent Me." "He that receiveth you, receiveth Me." "Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words; going forth out of that house or city shake off the dust from your feet.

Amen, I say to you it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city."

At times His heart overflows with tenderness, not that soft tenderness that arises out of sensitiveness and merely impinges upon the mind, but that virile tenderness as truly great hearts understand it.

One day He spoke to the multitude in the presence of Pharisees, and vehement were His words, and the Disciples as usual were near Him, and lo! in the midst of His discourse, "His mother and His brothers came," says St. Matthew. And as someone told Him of their arrival, He replied without breaking the thread of His thought: "Who is My mother and who are My brethren?" And stretching His hand towards those around Him, and lovingly glancing on them: "Behold," He said, "My mother and My brethren! for whosoever shall do the will of My Father in heaven, the same is My brethren and sister and mother." A sublime gradation of tenderness, which of a union of strength passes to one of charm, and blends both in that ocean which is called a mother's heart.

Such is the Divine Master as we delight to contemplate Him. We claim our share of those effusions and of that fellowship with which on earth He blessed His Apostles. Like them we are His friends, His brethren, His little ones. To us also He says: "As the Father hath loved Me, I also

have loved you." Through His loving grace we belong to His society and family — His Church. We may call Him our Friend, our *alter-ego,* and in doing so, far from being irreverent, we comply with the very desire of His heart. In spirit we may converse with Him, busy ourselves with His interests, inquire into His mysteries, and assume the care of His glory. A place is prepared for us in heaven which is His Kingdom and through Him is to be our Kingdom.

I said that the goodness of Jesus for His own manifests itself in the vocation to which He called them and the friendliness with which He tended them. But it manifests itself also in His patience with them. Patience here is the silence of His power. Indeed there was need of patience in dealing with these men "of little understanding," "fearful," "worldly," and "of little faith" — even as we are — full of good will, yes, but how weak and how blind! As soon as the Master begins somewhat to soar in His speeches they fail to follow Him, they forget everything: "If you knew Me, you would know My Father. You know Me now and you have seen Him," He says to them. And Philip replies: "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."

He preaches humility; and they crave for "the chief seats" — even at the Last Supper; charity, and

they want fire to come down from heaven and consume the Samaritan city. He strives to make them understand the spiritual character of His Kingdom, but they cling to the idea of a temporal Kingdom and wish to obtain from Him the promise of preeminence in it. He tells them that His Kingdom is not of this world; that the Kingdom of God is within them; that they must labor not for the food which perisheth but for that lasting food which means eternal life. The words reach their ears, but glide over their souls, as the seed upon a rock.

When He forecasts the days of the future: the spiritual instead of the carnal empire which they crave for, this time they are crushed; it is absolutely beyond the ken of their vision. "They understood Him not, and they were afraid to ask Him." "Their eyes were blinded." Such expressions often recur in the Gospels.

Characteristic of the state of their souls is what happened one day at Cesarea Philippi. Jesus revealed to them His intended journey to Jerusalem, His rejection by the leaders of His nation, the anguish and insult that awaited Him, His violent death. And Peter rises to his feet and interrupts those solemn utterances. He takes Jesus by the hand, leads Him a step or two aside, and begins to rebuke Him. "God forbid," He says; "this shall certainly not happen to Thee." And Jesus, severe this time, turning away from him, says: "Get thee

behind Me, Satan; thou art a stumbling-block to Me; for thy thoughts are not the thoughts of God, but of men."

Poor, dear St. Peter! He must have returned somewhat ashamed to his group; but well he knew from what Heart the words had streamed. The comparison, however, must have sunk deeply into his mind, for he too in his Epistle warns his readers against some, to whom, because they believe not, the headstone of the corner became "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence."

For all this, the extreme cases of severity on the part of our Lord were rare. As a rule He was graciously forbearing. For all their miseries He has an inexhaustible condescension — the compassion, the gentleness, the kindness of a mother. Their frailties and even their follies in no wise alter His exquisite tenderness for them.

See this page, which is the necessary corrective of the other, and one of the most delightful in the Gospels.

Jesus is alone. The Disciples are in a group, some distance from Him. They are discussing among themselves their endless controversy on precedence. It is not an impossible conjecture that the dispute had been stirred up by a claim of Judas, as being the office-bearer. At all events they boldly come to the Master and ask Him which of them shall be the greatest in the Kingdom.

Jesus answers not a word, but calling to Him a little boy, and lifting him in His arms and pressing him fondly to His breast, He sets him among them and says: "Verily, I say to you, unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the Kingdom of heaven." A graceful picture, worthy of the Son of God, full of grace and truth.

No doubt painful and odious to Him were those continuous claims and clamors of His Disciples. But they were His children, they were the little flock for whom He was to give His life, and He was patient with them and He spared them. "He waited," as the Scriptures say.

"He waited!" How many times has not God waited for man! Notwithstanding our sottish pride, our lack of charity, our outrageous selfishness — that eagerness with which we grasp everything that flatters us — He waits for us, He forgets Himself. Behold, He standeth behind our wall; He looketh in at the windows; He glanceth through the lattice. Behold, He standeth at the gate and knocks. He does not mind our delay; He will tell us tomorrow what we refuse to hear today; and cold and unyielding though we remain, He continues to irradiate us with His grace, like the sun that shines

majestic and tranquil above the frozen poles. Thus Jesus proceeds with the Apostles and with us. By persuasion, not by rebuke, does He deal with us. He knows that God has His hours but that man has also his own hours, and, instead of chiding, He bides His time, He teaches, He sows the seed and waits for the growth of His lessons. Stony may be the hearts that gravitate before Him, but He strives to find a cleft whereinto He may enter. And sometimes He succeeds and sometimes He fails, but He ever goes on loving us as though He were in need of our love.

Come the red days of the Passion, those darkly red days, when the soul of the Savior is steeped in awful dereliction and desolation. To say it with Bishop Ullathorne, "it is then that He reaches the last degree of spiritual suffering with the last degree of patience." Oh, that evening discourse, on Holy Thursday, in the Upper Room! That Supreme Supper when, "after having loved His own who are in the world He loves them to the end," He loves them to the last limits of love in giving them the Holy Eucharist! . . . One after another all the prophecies are fulfilled! . . . Listen to those sacred utterances which St. John alone has been bold enough to relate! . . . And hovering over all this, towering above all this, that feeling, that motherly feeling, His desire to console His own in advance for their cowardly conduct of tomorrow; to excuse

them for what they will do against Him; to assuage the pain of that remorse which heavily will batter their heart! "Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You shall seek Me, and as I said to the Jews: Whither I go you cannot come, so I say to you now. A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are My Disciples, if you have love one for another."

"Why cannot I follow Thee now?" exclaims St. Peter, "I will lay down my life for Thee."

Jesus answers: "Wilt thou lay down thy life for Me? Amen, I say to thee, the cock shall not crow till thou deny Me thrice." And addressing Himself again to the Eleven — for now Judas was gone: "Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in Me."

And later on, seeing them under the spell of His tenderness, and at last expressing their faith ardent and entire, He says: "So now you believe Me, but behold, the time is coming, it has come already, when you will be scattered to your homes, every one of you, leaving Me alone. But I am not alone, for the Father is with Me. I have said all this to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you shall have distress: but have confidence, I have overcome the world." A mother sees in her prodigal's departure but her prodigal's danger: so does Jesus.

The Disciples are not haughty but they are piteously weak. And He thinks of the despondency into which they may fall and He safeguards them against it: "Let not your heart be troubled"; such is the burden of His song. "And I have told you before it has come to pass, that when it shall come to pass, you may believe."

But what shall we say of Judas! Judas, one of the Twelve, one of those to whom He said: "I will not now call you servants, but I call you friends," Judas, the son of perdition. Full well Jesus knew that he was to be His betrayer: and during three years He kept him in His fellowship, treating him like the others, calling him to the same destinies, wrapping him up in His mantle of love. Not only did He not point out that "He knew whom He had chosen," but He gave him a mark of special confidence: He appointed him treasurer of the small stock of apostolic community. Why? Because perhaps he was best fitted for such task, but also in mercy to him, in view of his character. To engage in that for which a man is naturally fitted is the most likely means of keeping him from brooding. On the other hand, it must be admitted that as most of our life-temptations come to us from that for which we have most aptitude, when Judas was alienated and unfaithful in heart, this very thing became also his greatest temptation, and, indeed,

hurried him to his ruin. But only *after* he had first failed inwardly. And so, as ever in like circumstances, the very things which might have been most of blessing became most of curse, and the judgment of hardening fulfills itself by that which in itself is good. Nor could the purse have been afterwards taken from him without both exposing him to others, and precipitating his moral destruction. And so he had to be left to the process of inward ripening, till all was ready for the sickle.

Mysterious is the attitude of Jesus before His betrayer. Perhaps if we could analyze His feelings when in contact with Judas, we thereby would reach and grasp not only the Passion of His Heart, but the very heart of His Passion. As Bishop Ullathorne puts it: "The agony He felt at the gradual falling away of His poor, miserable Apostle comes out when He speaks of His coming Passion. He mentions a few only of the sufferings that were in store for Him, the sharpest, and chiefly the pains of the soul—mocking, spitting, betrayal. This last was the worst. He could bear insult, and cruelty from the Gentiles, who knew Him not, but betrayal from one of His own! Oh, the anguish there is in these words at the Last Supper: 'Amen, I say to you, one of *you* shall betray Me.' "

Lengthily and in silence He willed to taste that royally bitter sweetness of being betrayed by a

friend; a friend on whom He had lavished His kindness; a friend whose feet He had washed, when He knew He was already sold by him; a friend whom He had destined to be one of the twelve judges in heaven; a friend whom He called His friend, even when being betrayed with a kiss, to show thereby that he still was entitled to that name if such were his wish, to show thereby also His supreme effort of patience. Here as nowhere else are revealed the very summits of the goodness of Jesus, for from the manner He dealt with Judas we may surmise how He must have dealt with His other Apostles.

And still, as though this was not yet sufficient for His heart, Jesus, after He had left them, willed to give them another token of His goodness.

He had called them to a sublime vocation; He had admitted them to His most profound fellowship; He had endured everything on their part without ever altering His love. Through the gift of His Spirit He was about to complete and make perfect His unspeakable work in these men. But for His Divine Heart this was not yet enough. To crown it all; to render their life absolutely splendid; to carry on their fellowship into a supreme resemblance with Him; to take from their mantle the last remnant of human dust; to add another jewel to their garland of glory; to their happiness another pledge; to His own tenderness another gift; to

us another proof of His truth — He gave them out of His infinite power and love, what God only can offer and can give: He gave them the grace to die for Him.

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